



## **The DREAM Summer Schools and Camps 2011-2012**

**Location:** Cabarete, Dominican Republic, The DREAM Education Center

**Location:** La Ciénega, Dominican Republic, The La Ciénega Public School

**Location:** Caraballo, Dominican Republic, Caraballo Public School

**Location:** Abreu, Dominican Republic, Abreu Public School

**Primary Program:** At Risk Youth Program (Summer Camp and School)

**Number of children participating:** 395 children

**Ages:** 9-15 year olds

**DREAM Staff:** 100 Local and International Volunteers, 18 Dominican teachers, 19 DREAM Director's and Support Staff

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

We believe that quality, early and continuing education is the most effective way to break the cycle of poverty and change destinies. Our mission is to run inclusive, sustainable education programs for children and youth in the Dominican Republic that can be replicated throughout impoverished global communities.

### **STATEMENT OF NEED**

The academic and practical skills needed to escape poverty and be a productive member of society are lacking in the youth of the Dominican Republic. In increasing numbers, Dominican youth are succumbing to the pressures of the world outside the classroom and dropping out of school. These same youth are not given the tools necessary to overcome the risks of early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, crime and the many other pitfalls that surround them. The likelihood of a Dominican child completing a quality education is extraordinarily low. In fact, a Dominican student entering the education system has less than a 10% chance of graduating from high school by the age of 18 (United Nations, 2005). In comparison, the graduation rate among US students is 91% (USDE, 2006). This shocking disparity helps us understand why the Dominican Republic cannot break free from its current cycle of poverty. These statistics illustrate why the Dominican Republic's education system is in a state of emergency and new, innovative solutions are the only way to reverse this damaging trend. The vast majority of Dominican youth drop out of the education system prematurely and there needs to be specific programs that directly target this group of at-risk students. The Guzmán Ariza DREAM Summer Camp and School does just that. The vision of this progressive program is to work with and empower at-risk youth in the Dominican Republic and to create a sustainable model that can be replicated in additional impoverished communities.

### **HISTORY**

The DREAM Summer School and Camp started in 2004 as a response to the dismal number of hours, 2.4 (United Nations, 2005), the average student was receiving per day in a typical Dominican classroom. A visionary community leader, Fabio Guzmán of Guzmán Ariza Law Firm, partnered with DREAM to address this problem through a bold new concept. The Summer Camp offers participating youth additional hours of academic support, while offering public school teachers a platform to train with visiting volunteer education experts. All of these academic programs are intertwined within the backdrop of a traditional North American Summer Camp. The balance of schoolwork with excursions, sports, art, culture and games provides the campers with a summer as academically productive as it was fun. The first annual Summer Camp had a total of 60 campers from the community of Colonia Nueva, 3 public school teachers and 6 foreign volunteers.

In 2008, DREAM received a two-year grant from USAID to build and develop our Summer Camp model for future replication. This allowed DREAM to develop a sustainable, academic Summer Camp and School with Teacher Training component. "At-risk" is defined as those students who are two grade levels or more behind in school, those who are not in school, those of Haitian heritage, and/or those who are disabled. Over 93% of the students were at-risk under these indicators and over 80% were at-risk in multiple indicators.

In July 2011, 270 at-risk youth from the Cabarete and La Ciénega communities participated in the 8th Annual Guzmán Ariza Summer Camp and School. The four-week summer program ran from July 5th to July 29th in the communities of Colonia Nueva and La Ciénega.

The growth and success of the Guzmán Ariza Summer Camp and School led to the addition of two additional Summer Schools and Camps in 2011. The first was a partnership with International Student Volunteers (ISV) in a four-week program from June 24th to July 24<sup>th</sup> 2011. This was a group of over 50 US college students working within the pre-existing program and implementing a unique health component to over 80 youth in the community of Caraballo. In addition to the established academic activities, the students received a basic health curriculum, art classes and physical education. Constructive activities that build critical thinking and problem solving skills in and out of school time is greatly needed in Caraballo and the base to support additional programs in the community was one of the unanticipated successes of the program.

The second and final Summer School and Camp was a one-week program led by a DREAM-sponsored Peace Corps Volunteer in the community of Abreu. This “mini” Summer School and Camp had 45 participants and implemented a condensed version of the same curriculum used in Cabarete and La Ciénega.

## **PROGRAM**

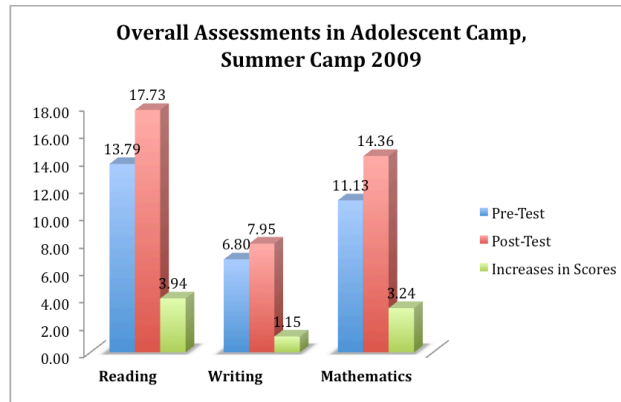
The objectives of the DREAM Summer Schools and Camps were developed with the purpose of creating a model support program that offers structure, guidance and academic enrichment to help keep children in school, create life and job skills, and most importantly, instill the confidence and self-esteem they need to develop to their full potential.

Each DREAM Summer School and Camp focuses on academic support, the personal development of students, and the training of local Dominican teachers to be better educators. The program itself consists of core academics: math, reading, and writing; as well as courses in life skills/health, art, music and dance, sports, and swimming. By offering education on socially prevalent issues such as racism, HIV/AIDS and basic health, adolescents are exposed to global issues that also affect their local community and daily life. The personal development of the students is manifested through the Advisory and Deportes Para la Vida (DPV) programs. In advisory class, students focus on various activities that promote character growth and community involvement. DPV is a youth leadership program in the Dominican Republic focused on HIV/AIDS prevention education. As a member of the international Grassroots Soccer network, Deportes Para la Vida (DPV) uses soccer, baseball, games, and peer mentoring "to engage youth in the creation and practice of healthy life choices."

The camp begins each day of the program with the applied *Theme* and Word of the Day. After the introduction of that word, supporting activities such as games, songs, and questions help provoke students' prior knowledge. Teachers guide their co-created lesson plans on the weekly themes of: *Identity* (Who am I?), *Hispaniola United*, and *Multi-culturalism*. Words of the day such as “diversity”, “self-esteem” and “culture” relate to the themes and promote critical thinking and literacy in the camp. Educational and fun excursions deepen the camp experience with hands-on learning experiences in Ocean World, Puerto Plata Airport, Teleferico and Centro Leon in Santiago.

A major component of the camp is the inclusion and support of public school directors and teachers in addressing the learning needs found in their students. DREAM's teacher-training model works with teachers from the local public schools to develop student-centered activities and strategies that they will take back with them to the classroom. In addition, teachers help us identify the students most at need and work alongside us in the camp to develop new instructional strategies that are effective and appropriate. Certified teachers from overseas work as literacy and math coaches to improve teaching and learning in the classroom, and local public school teachers are paired to teach in the interactive classrooms.

To improve students' chances to stay in school, we use academic assessments before and after camp.



## CONCLUSION

The strongest indicator of our success is the overwhelming number of students applying to the Young Stars Program, our year-round extracurricular program that serves as an extension to the Summer Schools and Camps. With primarily academic classes and no field trips or food, students are still enrolling at increasing numbers. This thirst for self-betterment and knowledge is encouraging in a community that has long struggled for decent schools and bright futures.

Public school teachers and directors are actively seeking new approaches to combat alarming illiteracy rates and deficiencies in basic mathematics, and most importantly, students are engaging in their education and their future. DREAM is able to support the public schools with proactive measures throughout the school year in the Young Stars Program.

Through the DREAM Summer Schools and Camps, at-risk students have the opportunity to improve their academic performance and engage in programs that confront the modern challenges of Dominican youth. In addition to continuing all of our 4 summer programs in 2012, we are developing systems and programs to turn key our best practices with non-profits and public schools across the country. The DREAM Guzmán Ariza Summer Camp & School has had measured success and opens the door to a replicable program that can resonate throughout impoverished communities in the Dominican Republic.

Through work with Teacher's College, DREAM has developed several tools that will allow DREAM to train other NGOs and communities how to run a successful camp and summer school. Handbooks on student-centered activities, creating community in the classroom, developing Advisory Programs and Literacy Strategies anchor the program. This along with curricular materials based on Dominican History and contemporary issues make the camp/summer school experience engaging and essential to develop productive, literate citizens.