

a program showcase

Ludeteca Móvil

by Michael Kalinowski

This Mobile Toy Library is a program that offers low-income children ages 2 to 12 years a space to grow and learn by providing access to toys, books, and educational materials. It is funded by donations of money, toys, and educational materials. The World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEPE) Mobile Toy Library started in Paraguay in 2001 with the help of the OMEPE World Committee and has been working in low-income neighborhoods of

Asunción and nearby cities ever since. Since it relies heavily on volunteers, the Mobile Toy Library moves from one center to another on weekends and is set up in community centers, churches, or schools. Before each visit, we go to the neighborhoods and explain the importance of play to the parents and other members of the community. Children from 2 to 12 years of age are invited through home visits and posters.



PHOTOGRAPHS PROVIDED BY THE PROGRAM

The Mobile Toy Library was designed so it could be set up easily. All toys and materials are carried without difficulty in big duffel bags and boxes and transported in cars and trucks. Once there, the adults, OMEP members, volunteers, and university students arrange the toys in five different learning centers: Blocks and Manipulatives, Little House, Dress Up, Puzzles and Games, Books and Art that guide the children to discover new materials.

The children play freely with a variety of toys and are encouraged to follow certain rules to help maintain a good atmosphere: share toys, respect each other and adults, and take good care of toys. Parents and siblings are also invited to participate and share the special moment with their children. The unique power of play can be observed as children

concentrate on playing mom and baby at the house, building an airplane with Legos®, or putting a puzzle together.



According to program coordinator Maria Burt, who also serves as President of the Paraguayan National Committee of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP), the most unique feature of this program is, "The Mobile Toy Library offers children from very poor neighborhoods the opportunity to play in a safe and nurturing environment and enjoy toys and educational materials. For many children, this is their first time with most of the displayed toys. The happiness reflected in their faces is what motivates us to continue with the Mobile Toy Library."

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The Program Showcases were developed by Michael Kalinowski as a component of the World Forum on Early Care and Education.

They are intended to highlight the work of particularly interesting, unique, and/or exceptional early childhood programs around the world.

Selected programs will appear in future issues of *Exchange*, and are also available on www.ChildCareExchange.com.