

A TU LADO PROJECT REPORT

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A Tu Lado with student volunteer firefighters at Universidad Simón Bolívar. Commander Aldo Yallonardo appears front and right.

Dear Friends,

After five great weeks in Venezuela, we have returned home to Minnesota. We are writing to thank you once more for your support and catch you up to speed.

In January of 2011, A Tu Lado set out to start a three-week EMT course in Caracas, Venezuela. In the following months, we formed a collaboration between Macalester First Aid, Venemergencia, and the student firefighters of Universidad Simón Bolívar (USB). Together with our partners, we designed a course to model a standardized curriculum for the region with the goal of creating positive change on three levels: the individual, through personal and professional empowerment; the community, through more effective emergency response; and internationally, by opening dialogue between our countries.

Briefly:

- **A Tu Lado seeks to make emergency medical education more accessible around the world.**
- **This summer we coordinated two courses and trained more than 80 students in Caracas, Venezuela.**
- **One course taught professional paramedics new concepts and skills, and the other trained a volunteer medical brigade in an urban slum.**
- **Our successes from this summer motivate us to found A Tu Lado as a federal nonprofit organization.**

What we consider basic elements of emergency medical education in the United States are often absent in Venezuelan training. Conversely, what we consider advanced techniques are some of the first skills taught to Venezuelan paramedics. A Tu Lado aimed to balance these skill sets. This June, we focused on the ABC's of medical assessment, the chain of survival, quality CPR, patient extrication, and transport. Three evenings a week, doctors and experienced paramedics taught conceptual classes, and on Saturdays students honed their skills at simulations coordinated by the firefighters at USB. In total, the students received 40 hours of instruction.

Many of our students work full-time. We couldn't fit all the material we wanted into three weeks, so we divided the curriculum into a preparatory course and a longer course to be taught at USB this coming January. The preparatory course this summer was referred to as a "pre-diploma." Students' evaluations praised the quality of instruction but also revealed they felt the "pre-diploma" title was misleading. It made the course sound incomplete, even though we covered many topics extensively and provided a range of new skills. In the future we plan to reframe the course as a Basic Life Support (BLS) program. It will still prepare students for the EMT program – similar to how BLS courses are prerequisites for EMT programs in the United States – but it will also grant a BLS-specific certification. Additionally, through internships, site visits and observerships across Caracas, we have built a wide network of healthcare professionals that will provide valuable opportunities for promoting upcoming programs.

We started a second initiative this summer as well. For many years our partners at Venemergencia envisioned a project to extend emergency medical

A Tu Lado seeks to extend emergency medical education worldwide through collaborations with local organizations.

services into impoverished communities of Caracas. A Tu Lado's alliance with the student firefighters at USB created an opportunity to begin. Because local medical clinics are often absent in these communities, our goal was to create volunteer emergency medical brigades that connect residents with inner-city hospitals. The perfect pilot location was Los Erasos, a 5000-person slum built into the hillside behind Venemergencia's office, where poverty, steep terrain, and lack of security impede healthcare access. These same obstacles forced us to think creatively in order to train volunteers for the brigade. We partnered with professors at IESA, a nearby business school, to secure a lecture hall and required participants to pay only a modest tuition fee (30 bolivares, or about 7 dollars) to represent their commitment to the program. Over 28 hours of instruction, we taught students to access, stabilize, and transport patients using improvised techniques suitable for their environment.

We and our partners believe we have had tremendous success. Nineteen students attended the paramedic course, and eight graduated. Sixty-five residents of Los Erasos attended the brigade course, and fifty-five graduated. And even though the courses we taught this summer are not the same ones that we set out to teach last spring, we see the same ideals alive in our work. The paramedics who attended the BLS course have a fuller understanding of physiology, CPR, and other basic protocols, and the students from Los Erasos, who had no background in emergency medicine, are still

Paramedic students rehearse extrication procedures in the USB ambulances.





“A Tu Lado has the potential not only to empower the population to deal with medical emergencies, but also to open new economic prospects to young people.”

**Dr. Andres Gonzales
Director of Venemergencia**



Brigade volunteers from Los Erasos pose on the steps after exercises; Dr. Andres Gonzales teaches a class in the lecture hall at IESA; Students practice triage on the USB campus.

beaming with pride for what they have learned. For the paramedic community, our course marks a humble but unmistakable beginning to standardizing emergency medical education. And in Los Erasos, the new brigade provides a source of unity and trust centered around a vital service. In both communities, our work opened an international dialogue on emergency medical knowledge and brought our nations closer together.

Still, our work is far from done. We have seen incredible opportunities for emergency medical education in Caracas and made tangible progress through our efforts. Not only do we intend to continue our work in Venezuela, we are also inspired with the prospects of leading similar initiatives in other countries. We are now turning our attention to founding A Tu Lado as a federal 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Federal status will transform this pilot project into a sustainable program by allowing us to apply for grants from philanthropic foundations. As we grow, we plan to open internship positions at Macalester College and domestic EMT programs so that more people, especially youth, can join in this endeavor.

We managed to run our project this summer slightly under budget. All savings are going toward the federal application fee, but we are still about \$500 short. Please contact us if you'd like to help us take this next step.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

The Founders and Directors of A Tu Lado:

Seth Forsgren, Terence Steinberg, & Ethan Forsgren