



Full History of LaAmistad

In the spring of 2000, Bill Maness served as the Recreation Director at the Gym at Peachtree in Atlanta, Georgia. Each day he noticed that a group of Latino children arrived by bus across the street from Peachtree Presbyterian Church. These children were from families which were fluent in little to no English, and completing daily homework was an impossible task for the students and their parents due to the language barrier. Maness' heart was heavy, and he took it upon himself to assist these families as much as he could by offering these students an opportunity to be tutored after school at Peachtree Presbyterian Church. He also wanted to do more to help each student's whole family and extended the offer for their parents to come to Peachtree Presbyterian Church for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. In 2001, Maness officially put a name to his after school outreach, and LaAmistad was born. LaAmistad, Inc.'s early beginnings served 30 students from Jackson Elementary School located in Buckhead. The program consisted of two afternoon sessions per week for the students and featured a time for students to use the recreational facilities at the church, take part in devotionals, and also offered them a structured homework/tutoring time so they could increase their academic success. He knew that these students not only needed direct academic instruction to improve academically, but also needed to build and strengthen relationships through mentoring. He knew that another crucial part in helping these students succeed was to offer them some of the same recreational activities and experiences that their non-Latino peers experienced on a daily basis; allowing them to feel more connected and confident amongst their peers in a school setting.

It was because of this well-rounded approach that Maness took with the students, that three years later, in 2004, LaAmistad won the prestigious Atlanta Public Schools A+ Community Achievement Award. This accolade is awarded to nonprofit organizations that go above and beyond to improve the Atlanta Public School community by consistently providing resources to students in efforts to improve academic performance in the classroom. This award holds great sentimental value to LaAmistad, Inc. because it allowed Maness to be recognized for the positive impact that his work and organization had prior to his sudden and unfortunate death later that year.

Johnny Myers took over as Executive Director of LaAmistad shortly after Maness' death. By 2005, LaAmistad, Inc. had doubled in size and was comprised of 60 students from three different schools in the immediate area. Those students attended LaAmistad After School at Peachtree Presbyterian Church for four afternoons each week, and were privileged to take part in recreational activities such as roller hockey, spiritual devotion, homework help, reading

comprehension exercises, a mentoring program, and to ensure learning continued over the summer, a summer camp. Myers knew that to continue the programs' progress new pathways would have to be taken for the organization. The year of 2006 was a momentous year in LaAmistad's history since it marked LaAmistad, Inc. becoming an official 501c3 nonprofit organization which would open many new doors of opportunity for LaAmistad, Inc. Becoming a 501c3 allowed LaAmistad, Inc. to apply for financial assistance through grants which is the leading way that LaAmistad, Inc. has been able to maintain a high rate of growth within the organization.

In 2009, LaAmistad, Inc. became a 2nd time Atlanta Public Schools A+ Mentoring Award winner. Atlanta Public Schools commended LaAmistad, Inc. for being an organization that analyzed each student's individual needs in order to customize the development of one-to-one relationships between students and adults. LaAmistad, Inc. was also commended for providing a safe, caring, and supportive environment for mentor relationships to be fostered within.

Myers had been working closely with Cat DaCosta McAfee within LaAmistad, grooming her to one day become an Executive Director. When Myers left in 2009, Jay Madden stepped in as Executive Director, while McAfee continued to manage operations. In 2011, LaAmistad, Inc. broadened its horizons once again by accepting a merger with English for Successful Living, Inc. For the last decade, English for Successful Living, Inc. has hosted the largest community-based adult English as a Second Language program in Georgia with introductory, beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of English classes offered throughout a year's time span. In 2012, McAfee was awarded the title Executive Director which she had worked years to achieve.

Today, LaAmistad After School at Peachtree Presbyterian has grown into a dynamic after school program that now facilitates tutoring five days per week along with reading and math enrichment, preschool education, one-on-one tutoring opportunities, summer camps, mentoring, and sports programs for students in grades 1-12. Since LaAmistad, Inc. strives to not only uplift each student, but also his or her family, parenting workshops as well as a comprehensive family resource center, are made readily available to each family. Families utilize the resource center's wealth of information regarding employment, health, counseling, legal and financial services, and scholarships, in order to improve quality of life for their family. Additionally, the resource center contains a wide array of library books for families to choose from and offers computers with internet access, a necessary educational component that is commonly lacking in Latino families' homes.

With the future always in the forefront of its mind, LaAmistad, Inc. is in the process of successfully replicating LaAmistad After School and LaAmistad English For Successful Living programs across Georgia and the United States. What first started as a helping hand to students across the street has evolved into a multi-dimensional organization serving neighbors and strengthening communities. LaAmistad, Inc. will continue to evaluate and reflect on its accomplishments so LaAmistad, Inc. can continue to be a pivotal opportunity in many more families' lives. LaAmistad, Inc. is now beginning to reach more communities across the country and training other churches and organizations to facilitate these award-winning programs.