Help, I need somebody to Help!

by **Gonzalo Odiard**, Sugar Labs Argentina, SLOBS member

The Past:

I'd like to tell you a true story about how many people working over a long period of time can build something that none of them could have built alone, and how this thing has helped others.

Sugar software is simple to use, but you need help to make the best use of all its possibilities. It's been widely proven that, while children have no problems exploring and discovering for themselves, adults prefer a written guide.

Because of this, between the years of 2006 and 2008, more than **20 volunteers** wrote the first edition of the FLOSS manual for Sugar [1]. In 2008 a Sugar Help Activity [4] was created to let people access the FLOSS manual content on an XO without needing an internet connection. **Chris Ball and Wade Brainerd** were the principals and maintainers of this until 2011 when **Bastien Guerry** took over. Versions of this Help Activity in French [5] and Arabic [6] were also developed. **Adam Hyde** was a major organizer of many of these efforts.

In 2012, **Manuel Kaufmann** made improvements in the Help Activity and ported it to Gtk3 (Gnome) as part of porting the whole Sugar platform. Because of many changes in Sugar and and its Activities, he organized all the work [7] that needed to be in done for a "Sprint" updating the Help Activity in April 2012 .This work was not just with the existing content, but also created new pages with information about more Activities.

The following year a new version of the Help Activity was added to Sugar, using the content generated at the Sprint. A simple text format was used that not only made it possible to generate web pages (similar to a wiki) but also to generate other formats such as epub and PDF. At the same time, it permitted the generation of archived translations to create web pages using the same images but with the text in other languages. Then, with the help of **Iain Brown Douglas** and **Kalpa Welivitigoda**, the Help Activity was brought up-to-date with text and images reflecting the changes in Sugar 0.100.

Iain completed an incredible number of corrections and wrote entire chapters explaining how to write texts in the new rst format. And, in 2013, Kalpa Welivitigoda worked on Sugar as a project for the Google Summer of Code. He developed many of the new characteristics of Sugar and revised the Help Activity so that it can be accessed from any Activity with a simple Alt+Shift+H. This makes it possible for the user to access Help without leaving the Activity they are working on [8].

The next big improvement was made during the Google Summer of code for 2014 when new pages for the Activities Abacus, Chart, Dimensions, Distance, Finance, GetBooks, Jukebox, Labyrinth, Log, MusicKeyboard, Physics, StopWatch, Story and TurtleBlocks3D were written by **Daksh Shah**, **Cristian García**, **Sai Vineet** and **Sam Parkinson**. Many times they based their work on materials written by other volunteers on the wiki.

The Present:

In December of 2014 we released the current version (17) of the Help Activity which now includes help for 34 different Activities. This year, 2015, Sam Parkinson added a new improvement making the content of updates to the Help Activity automatically appear at https://help.sugarlabs.org/.   Currently this is the most up-to-date version available for Sugar users. It's our hope that more volunteers will join in this project with new updates and improvements.

I just finished the Spanish translation and released Help 20, the first version with content in English and Spanish [4] http://activities.sugarlabs.org/en-US/sugar/addon/4051.

I like to think this is a good example of how the community works together to produce something that is a benefit for everyone who uses Sugar. It demonstrates that it isn't necessary to be a programmer to participate in projects for Sugar.

The Future:

Now that the translation to Spanish is complete, it would be good to make a general revision of all the content in the Help manual. There are changes to Sugar and the Activities that are still not included and it would be good to include more ideas for ways teachers can use the Activities with their students.

If you are interested in helping with this project, contact me by email (godiard@gmail.com) or on our sugar-devel mailing list [9]. Sources for the Activity can be found on GitHub [10]

To see the original article before translation and with many links, go to: http://bit.ly/1NRMuK1