

Proyecto Oportunidad

Planting seeds of opportunity in Nicaragua

April, 2010

Dear Friends and Supporters of Proyecto Oportunidad,

We left León, Nicaragua as Semana Santa (Holy Week) processions filled the streets every evening and clanging church bells greeted each day. Temperatures were in the high nineties and running water was available on very a limited schedule. Five different types of mangoes were in season, each with its own distinct super-delicious flavor. And the work of Proyecto Oportunidad was flourishing in equal abundance after three months of focused hard work.

Each of the five main Proyecto Oportunidad programs took shape through persistence, considerable creativity in dealing with unforeseen challenges, and a spirited caring partnership between you, us, and our dedicated Nicaraguan partners. We are so grateful to the many Nicaraguans who went above and beyond to realize our shared goals and to you for making this all possible.



Devora earns \$4 each day making "boyo," a caramel like treat, and selling it door-to-door.

Microcredit Program

We are thrilled to report that 19 mothers and grandmothers of El Centro Social pre-schoolers received Proyecto Oportunidad microloans of \$50 each. Sandra was able to buy greater quantities of butter, flour, sugar and eggs at a better price for her pastry business, thus increasing the profits that support her mother, 4 children and grandson. Maria used part of her microloan to purchase many large bottles of soda pop to sell in small plastic bags during Semana Santa - as an adjunct to her mini-pulperia (small store) in her home.



Yolanda is now making and selling 150 tortillas daily instead of sifting through trash at the dump to support her 5 children.



The first solidarity group is signing their contracts and receiving loans. We made the yellow cards for each woman to track her payments.

After attending our 6 classes on starting a small business, each woman worked on a plan and budget with assistance from El Centro Social staff. The women formed solidarity groups of 5 and selected a "coordinadora." The woman-to-woman support was and continues to be totally inspiring. Group members help others with little education or those flooded with anxieties about failure.

Loan payments are \$2/week, and 100% of the payments have been made so far. Most of the women are eagerly building their businesses. They will be able to apply for a new loan of \$100 once they've paid off the first loan.



At 5 am Gloria sells milk to street vendors and then sells the rest heated with coffee.



Johanna supports 5 family members (including her young son with Down's Syndrome) selling typical Nicaraguan dishes.

Dental Program

We set out to provide age-appropriate oral hygiene education for the 425 children at El Centro Social, their families and the classroom educators. The generous donation of 500 toothbrushes and the concerted efforts of Aura Teresa (El Centro Social Director) and Deborah kept the process moving forward. A collaborative team was formed with the dental school at the UNAN (National University), dentists working with MINSA (Ministry of Health), and educators at El Centro Social. Daily tooth brushing now occurs in many classrooms. Oral hygiene activities will become routine in all the classrooms before July.



There's a LOT to think about when learning to brush your teeth!!

We quickly learned that the MINSA dental "clinic" on El Centro Social grounds had few materials or functioning equipment - only two, sometimes three, unoccupied dentists. This was true at all the MINSA dental offices. Because private-pay dental care is unaffordable for the families of El Centro Social, Proyecto Oportunidad purchased and/or repaired the machines and provided necessary materials to do evaluations, cleaning, and fluoride application.

The evaluations revealed that 75% of the children have numerous caries and about one-third need teeth extracted. So, currently, the dentists - Rene, Ana Marie and Jeannine, are working their way through the long list of children needing treatment. Proyecto Oportunidad also outfitted the dental office with stuffed animals, colorful children's posters, toys, books and stickers for good behavior. Now, children are actually excited to get to go to the dental clinic.



Using mirrors, Deborah's teaching the fine points of tooth brushing to teachers and children.



Holding a stuffed animal for comfort, Renate gets his teeth cleaned with the new equipment.

Men's Program and Community Outreach

In poor Nicaraguan families, violence and paternal abandonment are common, with devastating results for young children. Proyecto Oportunidad is paying the salary of David, a community psychologist, to tackle this problem. Through home visits and developing personal relationships, David and Deborah have created a dynamic men's program at El Centro Social.



A tender moment between Oscar and his daughter Ani



Twenty-five to thirty fathers and grandfathers regularly attend the Thursday men's group called "Paternidad Responsable" (Responsible Fathering).

The men have formed three softball teams called "Los Padres," "Paternidad" and "Los Leones." Proyecto Oportunidad purchased mitts, balls and a bat and a local company is providing the uniforms (a necessary element we've been told). David and Deborah planned a "convivencia," a Sunday morning workshop for fathers and grandfathers and their children. Shared play (e.g., sack races, watermelon eating contest) and affectionate positive interactions were the focus. Photos from the event are being used for a paternidad mural. David and several of the fathers from this group have started another men's group at the largest of El Centro Social's community pre-schools, Arco Iris (Rainbow).



Young Cristhiane is taking the "transporting the jocote" game very seriously.



Juan is proudly introducing his sons. Our hope is to also positively influence the next generation.



Fifty percent of David's work is in the community with home visits and talking with families as they drop-off and pick-up their children from school.

In addition, through 2010 David will continue to evaluate and follow-up with children and families with special needs, facilitate two self-help groups for mothers, and lead two groups for couples. He is also helping the dentists work with the children who are especially anxious and fearful.

Tapia

Last year, Proyecto Oportunidad installed a latrine at "Dulce Sonrisa" (Sweet Smile), another of the community pre-schools. Because the children were vulnerable to passersby on the road alongside the latrine and they had no safe outside play area, we were asked if Proyecto Oportunidad could help with a tapia (wall or fence) around the tiny school grounds. We hired Andrés, our friend Vicenta's father, to head up the construction.



Community members helped out with last year's latrine project.



Program Director, Aura Teresa, Deborah, Kate and Aminta (Community Coordinator) meet with Andrés to discuss the plans.



School grounds without the tapia



After 3 weeks of hard work in unbelievable heat, Andrés and crew completed the durable tapia on-budget and on-time.

Kate walked to the site every other day, supporting the workers with kudos, safety glasses and ear plugs, photos of their fine work, and review and timely payment for building materials and labor. The educators and families of Dulce Sonrisa were delighted with the results and very grateful.

Educational Materials

Proyecto Oportunidad funds purchased everything from scissors, crayons, clay and glue for all 15 classrooms to contracting with a father who's a carpenter to make the frames for toddler teaching aids for buttoning, zipping and lacing. Older students are making "manualidades" - little butterflies of glued colorful pieces of felt on sticks to give to the children after their dental appointments. In addition, we purchased different themed workbooks for photocopying pages, educational posters for the classrooms, poster paints and brushes, and various graphic tools and puzzles for learning numbers and letters. The teachers are impressively creative with poster board, colorful sheets of foam paper, yarn, fabric, marking pens and glue. Each classroom has become more welcoming, bright and cheerful.



Education Coordinator, Soraiyda and Deborah sort materials for each center and classroom.

¿Qué más? What else?

Can you believe it? *Amazingly*, there is more!

School Uniforms - In our last newsletter we wrote about our collaboration with Maria Delia, a seamstress, and Proyecto Barrilete - a program for youth living in poverty. School uniforms are required by the public school system. With the left over fabric, Maria Delia made a few more uniforms for graduates of El Centro Social, whose families truly couldn't afford them.



These teens can now go to school, thanks to the 16 uniforms custom-made by Maria Delia.



Cart - Kate taught a "back protection" class at El Centro Social for the educators and kitchen staff. She quickly observed that the greatest risk to the workers' backs was carrying the large trays loaded with bowls of rice and beans or cups of juice numerous times each day. So, she consulted with the kitchen staff and designed a metal cart with shelves, sturdy wheels and handles. Of course, this sort of cart is unavailable ready-made. Again, Vicenta came through recommending José Mercedes, a skilled metal worker, to construct the cart. He accomplished this on Sundays outside of his usual work week. As soon as the cart arrived it's been in constant use, going up and down the halls transporting breakfasts, lunches, snacks and drinks.

Special Orders for Microcredit Women - As the Microcredit Program took off, we were always looking for ways to support the different businesses. On our visits to chat with the women, we purchased fruit from Martha, boyo from Devora, soda pop from Maria, and sampled Regina's delicious frijoles.



For the men's and children's convivencia, Proyecto Oportunidad purchased a 5-pound cake from Sandra and then, later, 30 cupcakes from Karla for snacks for the men's group.



Martha Regina is busily making fabric covered foam pads with denim fitted tops to cover the floor area in the infants' class.

As we departed León, the microcredit women were beginning to work together - Sandra helping Karla with the use of her oven, Karla helping Johanna serve food at her food stand, and Reyna and Gloria jointly buying larger quantities of milk at a better price. It was very exciting to see women's solidarity take these forms too!

Safety Vests and Glasses - We continued distributing safety vests and glasses donated by two Pacific Northwest companies. As you can see, they were put to immediate use and greatly appreciated.



This woman street sweeper liked the increased "visibilidad" to protect her from cars, motorcycles, trucks and horse carts in the early morning.



Alejandro can now protect his eyes on the construction site.



All of these programs and purchases were accomplished with \$12,400 from 91 donations.



We contributed long hours and the costs associated with our travel and living expenses. Truly, this would not have been possible without the dedicated assistance of our Nicaraguan partners and supporters - Aura Teresa, Vicenta, Andrea Doribel, Aminta, David, Soraiyda, Maria Delia, Andrés, Aleyda, Margarita, Christian, Ligia, Elieth, Erika, Rene, Ana Marie, Jeannine, José Mercedes, Aurora, Marcos, Veronica and Guillermo.

Each of the four administrators at El Centro Social is overseeing a different Proyecto Oportunidad program and is in regular communication. All will provide monthly summary reports through the end of 2010.

What's Next for Proyecto Oportunidad?

There's a wonderful synergy and momentum that is carrying us all forward in this work. We believe that *there is more that we can do!* Here's a preview of things to come:

- ☆ We are applying for **tax-exempt status** through an umbrella organization so that donors can benefit from tax deductions and we become more "official."
- ☆ Before we return to Nicaragua in December, 2010, we hope to gather the funds necessary to **build an indigenous community-based pre-school**. We have a team of enthused school administrators, teachers and families, the endorsement of the local community, the land, completed architectural and engineering plans, governmental approval of the plans, and an excellent local builder.

All we need is the \$\$ for the construction.

The pre-school has a name - "Las Gotitas de Esperanza" - Little Drops of Hope, a fitting name for this ambitious project.



- ☆ This year we plan to develop a **web site** so that our information is more accessible and we can reach more people.
- ☆ We want to **continue supporting** the Microcredit Program, Dental Program, purchase of educational materials, and the community psychologist position and men's program through 2011.

Mil Gracias!

Again, THANK YOU for supporting these worthy projects. With your help, Proyecto Oportunidad has benefited more than 450 children and their families through microloans, dental care, oral hygiene education, toothbrushes and daily brushing, educational materials, an ergonomic cart, school uniforms, fathers' parenting skills and support groups, a protective fence around a neighborhood school, couples' and women's groups, and community outreach, psychological support and consultations to families and children in need.



And perhaps more important than all these "things," is the way many Nicaraguans have been moved and inspired by our collective caring and generosity.

If you'd like to organize a gathering at your home or workplace - we'd love to come, tell inspiring stories, show more pictures of life in Nicaragua, the people and the work of Proyecto Oportunidad.

Deborah DeWolfe and Kate Stewart
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