

Project Opportunity

April 2012 Newsletter

Each year Project Opportunity accomplishes even more in León, Nicaragua. We've established a wide network of trusted relationships and built an excellent reputation. After four years, hundreds of preschoolers and their families have been touched.

We can't thank our donors and supporters enough - it's because of you that all this GOOD has taken place. Please take a moment to review the accomplishments that follow - they reflect grass-roots community work at its best, we're proud to say.



Project Opportunity, with the help of Project Minnesota-León and many Nicaraguans, built this new community preschool, Gotitas de Esperanza (Little Drops of Hope) in 2011. A community artist and father of one of the children painted the welcoming murals.

"Gotitas" becomes more than a school...

Not only is "Gotitas" a haven for children, it is a meeting place for parents and a training site for mother-educators from 4 other nearby community preschools.

Project Opportunity writes small grant proposals...

Collaborating with community leaders, we developed proposals and solicited funds to install a main entry gate and ceramic tiles to replace the original concrete which was too rough and difficult to clean. This time Project Minnesota-León paid 60% of the costs and we did the rest.



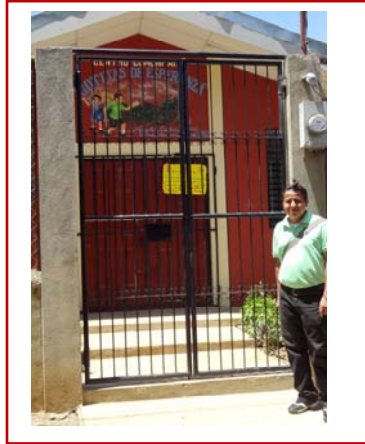
The "Gotitas" parents at this parenting class are appreciative that they aren't sitting in the children's little wooden chairs. Project Opportunity purchased 20 adult-sized plastic chairs.



What's New This Year?



David teaches preschoolers about emotions. Children learn to "use their words" instead of their fists.



Dámaso Centeno, a metal worker from the community, designed, built and installed the entry gate - a necessary addition.

Project Opportunity now has a full-time community worker carrying on the work *every day* through 2012!

David Arturo Jirón Aguilera grew up in a pueblo near León and later earned a degree in psychology. Deborah has mentored him since 2008. In return, he has saved her from potential cultural gaffs and eagerly taken on new challenges.

David is talented, kind, professional, organized and absolutely thrilled to be working with us. He manifests the mission and values of Project Opportunity as he works tirelessly to improve the lives of Nicaraguans.

The job: David and Deborah are in constant contact problem-solving this and delicately navigating that. His job description includes working with the preschool families and children, developing small grant proposals in collaboration with community leaders, supporting our scholarship students, liaison with communities and NGOs, overseeing the dental program and working closely with the "Gotitas" educators. Above all, he works with integrity, humility, respect, flexibility and patience.

iSalva una Vida! (Save a Life) Classes

Kate developed and piloted *iSalva una Vida!* classes. Eighty-five Nicaraguan mother-educators, parents, older siblings and university professors and staff learned how to do CPR and first-aid basics on infants and adults. Many had stories of neighbors and family members who had died because no one knew these skills. Classes were great fun yet practical and serious.



Andrés was the 'maestro de obra' for the "Gotitas" construction project in 2011 and has 14 grandchildren - all good reasons to learn CPR.

Five CPR mannequins purchased with donated dollars traveled with us to León.

Young Nicaraguans with Physical Disabilities



Leveraging our impressive track-record, cultural sensitivity, and coordination skills, we've partnered with other NGO's to more than triple our accomplishments. Here young Jorge benefits from collaboration between Project Opportunity and Fundación para la Rehabilitación Walking Unidos (FURWUS). Building on this success, we've recently begun working with a 4-year-old boy with cerebral palsy and his family.

Project Opportunity works with the child's universe - family, school and neighbors. We coordinate and participate in the evaluation, treatment and rehabilitation phases. We stay involved by providing support and follow-up to ensure a successful outcome.

Jorge has severe club feet. His father carries him a mile to one of the community preschools where we work. Often, Jorge just sat and cried because he wanted so badly to run and play. His family lives in extreme poverty. Their home of plastic, cardboard, and tin with dirt floors is always tidy.

A few years ago, we met and worked with the director of an NGO that helps people with physical disabilities. This colleague, Santiago Castellón, facilitated Jorge's evaluation and treatment with a local orthopedic expert. Jorge is in his 5th week of 10 weeks of casts. They are changed weekly and will gradually straighten his ankles and feet. Next, he will have surgery, physical therapy and then hopefully be able to walk with orthopedic shoes.

Jorge and his family are very responsibly engaged in this arduous process. David of Project Opportunity provides support, coordination and regular educational/therapeutic visits. Above is "Tarzan", Jorge's cherished companion. We purchased him in a 2nd hand store and gave him a bath and red T-shirt.

David helps Jorge get ready for first grade. They are working on colors, shapes and numbers. Neighbors' children like to participate too. Jorge loves to show his homework in his new notebook.



*Jorge at our initial evaluation meeting.
Photo taken by FURWUS*



Scholarships and Educational Support

Occasionally we encounter special young people who move us to consider helping with their educational expenses. We examine the need, the family and realistic ways to help. We believe that these scholarships truly capture our mission of "planting seeds of opportunity."

David provides on-going support and monitoring when we are in the US and coordinates tutoring when needed. The scholarship accounts are managed by independent trusted Nicaraguan colleagues. We develop appropriate performance goals with each recipient.

Meet Scarleth, Belén and José Carlos



Scarleth Patricia Blanco Manzanares is 13 years old, in 8th grade and very bright. She is a top student. Deborah first noticed her as a 5th grader when she recited by memory a 3-page Rubén Darío poem with astonishing understanding and expressiveness. She is the oldest of three and carries many of the family responsibilities while her single mother, Karla, works. With Project Opportunity's help, she now attends Colegio Asunción, the best private Catholic school in León. She made the transition from public to this more difficult private school with relative ease - earning mostly all A's. With help from our secondary school tutor, Lenin Pérez, she caught up with her fellow students in English and Math. She hopes to study medicine and become a doctor. Her tuition, uniforms, books and expenses cost \$800 per year.



Yaren Belén Bravo Blanco is 9 years old and in 3rd grade. Unlike her older sister Scarleth, Belén struggles to learn and remember. She's baffled by her poor grades even though she copies and copies. Without help, she will not pass 3rd grade and probably would lose confidence all together. Project Opportunity is providing 4 hours of tutoring each week with Marjorie Hernández, a certified primary teacher and excellent tutor. She has found that Belén is highly motivated and responds well to creative, animated and tactile approaches to learning. Marjorie provides monthly reports and sets learning goals. The cost for tutoring for the year is \$300.



José Carlos Ortega is a 20 year old filled with big ideas and dreams. He is the oldest of three. He grew up with frequent moves, sporadically attending school along the way. When at school, he earned surprisingly good grades. His parents moved to Costa Rica to find work and at 16, he joined them. He worked in construction going to secondary school at night for several years. Following a recent return to León, José Carlos was accepted at a vocational training program where he can also earn his High School degree. He's enthusiastic about working in the tourism industry and eventually wants to go to the national university. David is working with him to help him focus and prioritize his time and Lenin, the tutor, is helping him in Math. His educational expenses cost \$450 for the year.

Dental Program - Brushing and Clinic Visits

Deborah taught 14 new dental hygiene mother-helpers to teach over 200 preschoolers how to brush and have fun while doing it. Thanks to generously donated neon-colored toothbrushes, children were able to choose new ones for school and home.

The mothers worked individually with each child at least five times AND taught their parents. Importantly, the mothers commented that they learned proper brushing techniques enabling them to champion dental hygiene in their homes too.





Project Opportunity purchased dental clinic supplies like gloves, fluoride and tool replacements again this year. The dentists were then able to evaluate, clean, and treat over 100 5-year olds. The compressor purchased in 2011 still keeps the equipment running. We pay transportation costs for the children and parents to get to the clinic for their first visit.

The ripple effect - beyond TEETH...Jessica (above) volunteered to be the parent "Health Coordinator" at "Gotitas" after her satisfying experience teaching brushing. Juana (below L) was shaking with nerves the first time she taught with the 'big teeth.' Yeris (below M) expresses how valuable her experience as a dental hygiene mom was - it gave her the confidence to sign up for classes to start a small business and apply for a microloan.



Educational Materials



Each year Project Opportunity goes shopping in Managua. Classroom supplies including crayons, scissors, clay, glue, colored paper, notebooks, etc. are purchased and distributed to 14 preschool classrooms with over 300 children in attendance.

We provide teachers with staplers, pens and pencils, tape, poster board, educational posters, colored foam and markers. Truly, all of these materials are needed and critical for basic instruction and activities.

Marcos, Deborah and Soraida, the Education Coordinator, purchase pitchers, funnels, little activity bowls and adult chairs at the Casa de Plástico (plastics store) in Managua.



Donated treasures...High quality educational toys donated by parents in the US - wooden puzzles, shapes boxes, books, and building toys travel with us in big plastic boxes. One set has become a traveling library and another is permanently at "Gotitas." The children love them.



Teacher Training

Dr. Laurie Greig, our friend and Seattle educational psychologist, came to León for 2 weeks to help. She brought more wonderful donated materials. After several days observing preschool classrooms, she was invited to train 18 mother-educators representing 5 centers. She developed numerous low-cost activities that encourage more structure, mutual respect and learning. The teachers were enthusiastic, open and appreciative. We are so grateful to Laurie for her hard work and flexibility.



Many teachers reported successes when they tried out the new activities.



David, Project Opportunity's community psychologist, valued learning from Laurie as well. He continues to implement her ideas and suggestions. He works closely with Cecilia and Glenda, the educators at "Gotitas," to gradually achieve a more dynamic and safer learning center. His work extends to the families, providing encouragement for positive parenting and volunteering at the school.

Raquel is role playing being a 2 year old as she "walks the line." This simple activity teaches balance, concentration, and taking turns. It can be adapted for all ages...like walking with book on one's head or a toddler being helped by an older child.

Simple Interventions - Big Results



Water conserved... Fernánda and José wash their hands before lunch, a new daily routine. We realized that lots of precious water was being wasted as 40 children washed their hands. Project Opportunity purchased colored bowls to hold just enough water for each washing and then taught the children how to use them. The children are learning hygiene, water conservation and colors - all at the same time.



A micro-business started... Xochilt was hired as a dental hygiene mother-helper last year. She received intensive encouragement from the other mothers and Deborah as her confidence plummeted during her "build a business" classes with Fundación León 2000. She went on to complete the program, obtain a microloan and start her own neighborhood bakery to support her family. She is ever appreciative and her bread is delicious!



A life saved... Elieth (in blue) is participating in our *¡Salva una Vida!* class. Recently, she wrote to tell us that during Easter Week her 8-year-old nephew choked on a jocote (hard round small fruit). She jumped up and did her newly learned Heimlich maneuver and out flew the jocote - saving this child's life! She wrote: ¡Qué horrible! ¡Qué increíble! Muchísimas gracias.

These are just a few examples of the many seeds that Project Opportunity has planted. Every day we see the fruition of seemingly small efforts. You, our donors and supporters, are essential to this circle of sharing and good will.



Thank you so much for caring.

Deborah DeWolfe and Kate Stewart

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