



Project Opportunity

April 2015 Newsletter

Each year, our Project Opportunity team generates more successes in León, Nicaragua - both large and small. We work with families and community groups to better understand their needs, obstacles and strengths. Poverty profoundly affects life options. Our collaborations foster opportunity, hope and empowerment - whether it's a scholarship, job training, a preschool bodega or hearing aid. Your contribution is essential to our continued grass-roots efforts. Read on to celebrate accomplishments and see what's next.

News highlights:



Job training graduates now have jobs

Mothers with little education and no employment experience can't find jobs in León. After 8 weeks of Project Opportunity (PO) job training classes, a 4-week practicum in a hotel and extensive coaching and family support, 10 mothers are now employed in their first-time-ever paying jobs (see p. 5).



Preschool enhancement and teacher training

Fifteen children ages 2-5 years attend Dulce Sonrisa (Sweet Smile) preschool, located in the poorest of neighborhoods. The minimally trained mother-educator responsible for their care benefits from the weekly participation and on-going training of PO teacher, Vilma Dolmus (see p.7).



¡Salva una vida! program boasts at least 9 lives saved

Now in our 4th year of providing CPR/basic first-aid classes in León schools, churches, social service programs, restaurants and hotels - over 700 Nicaraguans are trained and many have been re-trained. Juan Duarte, our new instructor, brings 12 years of experience as a First Responder and accompanies René Real, PO class coordinator (see p. 6).



Community-based tooth brushing

This year PO hired 12 enthusiastic preschool mothers to teach over 250 preschoolers how to thoroughly brush their teeth. Toothbrushes were donated by friends of PO. The kids have great fun getting to brush teeth! Preventive dental care is a necessity as none of these families can afford the cost of treatment.

Project Opportunity donors and supporters (see p. 8)

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Project Opportunity Team in Nicaragua

Each team member is thrilled to work with PO. All get to learn and grow professionally while applying his or her skills to new challenges. As you can see, the opportunities PO generates come in many forms. Being a part of PO accomplishments that benefit fellow Nicaraguans is a dream job come true.



Our team from L to R: Doribel Niño (Accountant), Andrés Hernández (Manager, construction projects), Vicenta Hernández (Instructor, hotel housekeeping class), Vilma Dolmus (Teacher, Facilitator PO programs), Deborah DeWolfe (Director and Co-Founder), René Real (Teacher, Facilitator PO programs), Renne Jirón (Instructor, computer skills class), Róger Fernández (Math and Physics tutor), Kate Stewart (Co-Founder), Not pictured: Juan Duarte (Instructor, CPR classes) and Alberto Duarte (Transportation).

OUR PROGRAMS



PO scholarship student Lester Gutierrez graduates from La Salle.

Lester Vladimir Gutierrez Cabrera is the first in his extended family to graduate from high school. His parents, Ligia and Hilario, were proud beyond words. Ligia's home tortilla business supports the family of 5; Hilario suffered a debilitating work injury several years ago. The family home is made of black plastic and has a tin roof and dirt floor. They made considerable sacrifices that allowed Lester to study. We were all tearful with joy at the graduation and then celebrated with the extended family at a post-graduation dinner held in their nearby church. Read on to learn what Lester is doing this year...

Meet Project Opportunity Scholarship Students



Larry Ramos is 20, attends the national university (UNAN) in León and is in his 4th year (of 5) of the Nursing Program. His family struggles economically. Larry's scholarship allows him to continue his studies, which he certainly deserves as one of the top students in his class. His tuition has been waived by UNAN and PO pays for his uniforms, books, supplies and fees (cost: \$800). Over the years of PO support, Larry has gradually become more confident and self-assured. He will truly be an asset in his profession.



Scarleth Blanco is 16 and attends 12th grade at Colegio Asunción. She is dedicated, wise, fun AND an excellent student. This is her 5th year as a PO scholarship student; she graduates in November 2015. As the oldest child, she assumes family responsibilities during her single mother's long work hours. Scarleth's tuition, uniforms, books, supplies, school activities and tutoring cost \$1600 per year. We've begun investigating universities in Managua - Scarleth wants to become fluent in English and study international relations and business.



Lester Gutiérrez is 18 and earned his high school diploma from Colegio La Salle in 2014. After considerable investigation and discussion between all of us, Lester and his family decided that a 3-year technical program in advanced Auto Mechanics would best match his interests and abilities. Lester now attends Politecnico La Salle, a recognized institution with good practicum opportunities. Lester loves learning about engines, electricity, computers and more. Program, uniform, lunch and materials costs will be \$1300 this year.



Shirley Astacio is 15 and attends Sagrado Corazón de Jesus. Shirley is highly motivated yet suffers from severe hearing loss in both ears due to medical malpractice when she was 3. PO has shared the costs of hearing evaluations and hearing aids since 2011. Our detailed evaluations have revealed that Shirley has not learned many basics of daily living nor academic fundamentals due to her severe auditory impairment. Having sounded the alarm, all parties (school, family, Shirley and PO) are engaged in a comprehensive and coordinated effort to help Shirley fill in the gaps. Academic costs will be \$1200.



Yaren Belén Bravo Blanco is 12 and attends 6th grade in the public schools. Her family life is unstable and chaotic, making consistent attention to her studies impossible. Belen's grades have gone up and down depending on family stress - but they've been trending upward as she gains confidence and manifests the benefit of PO's tutoring, caring and support. She's an at-risk preteen and we believe that engagement in her education and wellbeing benefits her future options. The cost for uniforms, tutoring and materials is \$500.



Moises Reyes, Jorge Reyes, Heidi Sánchez and Jeiling Reyes attend 4th, 3rd, 2nd and 1st grades respectively. We have a long standing relationship with this very hard-working yet economically disadvantaged family. The parents graduated from our primary education classes in 2013 and young Jorge now plays soccer thanks to PO efforts with his club feet. Our staff has helped both Moises and Heidi and their parents deal with bullying at school. Two afternoons a week, René (PO teacher) helps the mothers and children with homework. PO shares school costs with the 2 families (\$600).

Our facilitators, Vilma Dolmus and René Real, are experienced educators. They are actively engaged with each student, family and school. We review exams and homework frequently and provide tutoring, counseling and additional supports when needed.

Educational and Job Training Opportunities for Parents



Family members enthusiastically applauded as each graduate proudly received his or her diploma (Deborah, Concepción, Claudia, Ana, René, Vilma, Rafael, Maribid, and Martin). Tears were shed and pot luck dishes were served along with an elaborately decorated cake.

What's next for these highly motivated adults?

PO continues to work with the 10 adults who now have 6th grade diplomas (2013 and 2014 PO graduates) and 8 additional adults from these same families and communities. We facilitate access to secondary studies, technical training on the weekends, jobs, and specialized training responsive to personal goals. PO follow-up with these 18 fosters hope and leads to improved life opportunities. The roots of family poverty are battled little-by-little.

PO graduating 6th grade class of 2014

This year's group of adult students attended classes for 10 months and finally earned their diplomas. **Why?** Some had found that the inability to do basic math destroyed their small business efforts. Others couldn't help their children with homework. Not being able to write or read very well limited their lives and options. This diploma is required to work at the local factory.

PO teachers René and Vilma taught the government-approved curriculum with creativity and dedication. They visited students at home and provided help sessions, counseling and encouragement.



Community leader, Azucena, offered her home and yard for the PO primary classes, held rain or shine through 2014.



Johanna and Hazel (2013 PO 6th grade grads) said they wanted to learn how to use the computer and the internet. Renne patiently taught them from absolute zero and now they go to the "cyber" on their own and slowly surf the net.



Martin makes the best frioles in León and cooks Ana's tortillas at the same time. They requested help with accounting so that they could save up to eventually add cheese and eggs to their home business.



Xochilt wanted to learn how to decorate cakes so that she could make beautiful party cakes to sell in her neighborhood. PO found an instructor and supported the classes. Now Xochilt is selling 4+ cakes with roses and more each week.

Basic Accounting Classes and In-home Consultations

Why do small home businesses often fail?

1. Owners must buy in small quantities or on credit and can't sell their product at a price that can be profitable.
2. They are paying more than 25% interest on microcredit loans that were necessary to start the business.
3. Some owners don't have the arithmetic skills to give accurate change when they sell their products.
4. Most owners have no business plan nor accurate accounting method to determine the costs or earnings of the business.



Doribel Niño, PO accountant in León, teaches home business owners the essentials of keeping track of expenses, product prices, sales and profits...then saving for emergencies.

Over 50% of the employment in Nicaragua is in this "informal" sector.

Here Doribel and René help Xochilt (decorated cakes and pizza) develop an accounting system to determine if she's making a profit from her hard work. Xochilt's 4th grade math level necessitates reliable checks and balances.



Job Training in Hotel Housekeeping and Kitchen Prep



Vicenta Hernández, PO hotel housekeeping instructor, and our PO team taught 3 groups of mothers, with the shared aim that they become responsible, capable employees. We collaborated with 5 León hotels (see p. 8) that generously provided 4-week practica. Prepared with both hotel and employment skills (e.g., team work, punctuality, friendliness, plan for childcare), 10 of these women have succeeded in a range of first-time jobs. PO remains engaged - consulting with boss problems, pay conflicts and family crises.



Skarlette (front page), Aracelys, Tania, Karla, Francisca, Ligia, Vicenta (instructor) and Maribel are working in hotels, restaurants and the home of a Fulbright family from Massachusetts.

¡Salva una Vida! / Save a Life! Classes



An office worker at the Asilo de Ancianos (Elder Care Facility) learns excellent CPR technique. Juan and René demonstrate infant CPR (top R) and teens practice at teen shelter "Las Tias".



Everyone has a story... of a family member, friend or neighbor who died from choking or drowning. The importance of citizen first responders is undeniable in León. Enthusiastic PO class participants become committed and capable to save lives. Thanks to grants from Oxford-León Association and Trust, we have maintained a robust program with 13 adult and child mannequins in constant use. Each year PO provides at least 20 classes in León.

This Year's Construction and Maintenance Projects



New Bodega for Storage

Preschool coordinator and nutritionist, Mercedes, requested that PO build a bodega to store kitchen supplies and some classroom materials. Family members helped our construction team. What a difference this added space makes!



Before



Safe Wiring for Preschool

Preschool Las Tortuguitas (Little Turtles) had all their wires dangling and exposed and no electrical panel; it was extremely dangerous for little ones. Manuel and his crew rewired the school and new bodega and installed a panel and better, less expensive lighting.



After

Gotitas' New Red Roof

Each year we collaborate with maintenance projects at Las Gotitas de Esperanza (Little Drops of Hope), the preschool that PO built in 2011. This year's requests were to paint the tin roof to prevent corrosion and prolong its life, and to do the same with the fence tubing. Families helped by cleaning and sanding both the roof and fencing.

PO hired Chipito, a community member, to do the work.



Preschool Enhancement



On Tuesday mornings PO teacher, Vilma Dolmus, structures and demonstrates learning activities while orienting the mother-educator at the center.

Community preschools: PO works with 3 centers located in adjacent, underserved and very poor neighborhoods. A total of 130 children attend and receive meals and limited pre-primary education.

Facilities improvements: Over the 7 years of our work in León, PO constructed one of the preschools, built walls/fences around 2, installed ceramic flooring in classrooms, replaced latrines with a septic system and bathrooms, upgraded wiring and an electrical system and built a bodega.

Provision of educational materials: Each year PO supplies books, posters, donated ed toys, puppets, crayons, clay, paper, paints, glue and more so that the young students and educators have materials for classroom activities.



Educator training and support: PO's two teacher/facilitators provide teacher training and on-site assistance to enhance ideas and methods used by educators from the community.

Dental hygiene education: Thanks to PO, more than 2500 preschoolers have learned to brush and understand why taking care of their teeth is important. This is our 6th year of "higiene bucal"!



PO constructed preschool (2011) is shown on the left...this year 45 children attend and benefit. On the right, little Taylor learns to brush his teeth with the help of Lisbett, one of the 12 dental hygiene moms hired by PO.

YOU, our friends and donors, are essential partners in these empowering programs and personal achievements.

Our shared efforts generate opportunities that help Nicaraguan families move out of poverty.

Together, we inspire hope and astounding benefit.

Thank you so much for caring.

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¡Mil gracias a todos!

Despite our best efforts, errors can occur. Please accept our apologies if we misspelled or omitted your name. We'd be grateful if you would let us know.