

Project Opportunity

May 2013 Newsletter

Now in our 5th year, Project Opportunity's life-changing accomplishments continue to grow and solidify. Our trusted network of Nicaraguan friends, professionals and organizations helps us to turn big ideas and dreams into realities.

We can't thank our donors and supporters enough - it's because of you that all this GOOD is taking place. Please take a moment to review our newsletter and smile - we believe our efforts reflect grass-roots community work at its best.



In December 2012, fifteen 5-year olds graduated from the community preschool, Gotitas de Esperanza (Little Drops of Hope), constructed by Project Opportunity in 2011. In true Nicaraguan style, the graduation was a gala family and community celebration - an appropriate launch to first grade.

Project Opportunity news and successes of 2013:

- ☆ Hired a licensed preschool teacher, René Real, and a classroom assistant to work with full-time Project Opportunity coordinator, David Jirón
- ☆ Constructed a fence/wall around the preschool to create a safe recreational area and repainted school inside and out
- ☆ Expanded the scholarship program to include 8 young people and 4 adults (primary education)
- ☆ Providing advocacy, evaluation, rehab therapy and family support for 6 children with disabilities
- ☆ Trained Pio Romero to teach CPR and basic first-aid classes to teachers, bus drivers and other community groups (over 100 Nicaraguans trained to date)
- ☆ Hired and trained 15 mothers to teach over 200 preschoolers and their parents to brush teeth
- ☆ Collaborating with local dentist, Dr. Jorge Olivas and his wife/assistant Sandra to work with children and families who don't have access to dental care (153 visits to date)
- ☆ Collected, purchased and distributed books in Spanish, classroom supplies and donated educational materials to 4 community preschools serving over 150 children

Project Opportunity Team in Nicaragua



From L to R: Vicenta Hernández (consults and will teach hotel- and house-cleaning skills), Kate Stewart (Co-founder), David Jirón (Coordinator), Pio Romero (teaches CPR), Deborah DeWolfe (Director and Co-founder), Doribel Niño (reviews accounts in Nicaragua and consults), René Real (Preschool Teacher and outreach to families).

As important as **WHAT** we accomplish is **HOW** we do it. Respect, humility, fostering empowerment and punctuality are priorities in every encounter. We aim to treat each individual with dignity, always reinforcing their personal strengths and optimizing learning.

Our team embodies these values and the creativity they unleash. We are grateful to work with such fine and dedicated people - and they love their jobs with Project Opportunity.

Preschool Enhancement

Project Opportunity works in 4 community-based preschools located in the Sutiava area of León. The majority of our resources have been invested in one, "Gotitas de Esperanza" (Little Drops of Hope). Since completing construction in 2011, "Gotitas" has become a vibrant, welcoming preschool.

In the other less equipped preschools we provide:

- Educational materials and classroom supplies
- Dental program for children and educators
- Advocacy and assistance for disabled children
- CPR/First Aid classes for educators
- Funding for small improvements
- Community facilitation to develop proposals and budgets for major improvements to present to other nonprofit organizations



Belinda proudly shows off her first blocks bridge. Wooden blocks were collected at second hand stores and donated by our generous US supporters.



Mercedes and Ana of preschool "Arco Iris" (Rainbow) receive the first installment of supplies and books from David of Project Opportunity.



Juan copes with his first day at preschool.



How thrilling and heart-warming it is to see donated puzzles from the US put to such good use!

René - Our new preschool teacher

René Real, Project Opportunity's licensed preschool teacher, began full-time work in January. She brings extensive experience with community building and parenting classes as well. With impressive skill, creativity and good humor, she's won the confidence of parents, community leaders, the existing mother-educators and, most importantly, the 40 preschool children. Under her direction, the preschool, "Gotitas" is a dynamic, joyful place of learning.



Advocacy for Disabled Children



David, our Coordinator, worked closely with Jorge and his family through 8 months of casts, a surgery, physical therapy which continues, home tutoring and now a scholarship to attend the nearest first grade.

Through our trusted presence and networks, we learn of children with special needs. For families living in poverty, accurate evaluations and rehabilitation services are costly and beyond reach.

We've developed working relationships with qualified Nicaraguan professionals and nonprofit organizations that collaborate with us to help these young people with disabilities achieve their potential.

Currently, Project Opportunity is working with 3 girls with hearing impairments (all caused by poor medical attention in infancy), 2 boys with physical disabilities and a 2-year-old with Down's syndrome.



Jorge's Story



Jorge was born with severe club feet, a condition that is corrected in infancy in the US. At age 5, Jorge spent his days in a chair, often crying and frustrated because he couldn't run and play with his preschool classmates.

We began working with Jorge and his family 18 months ago. An incredible collaboration developed between 6 NGOs, orthopedists, physical therapists and Jorge's family. David and Deborah of Project Opportunity were at the helm - coordinating, cajoling, advocating and supporting.

Now Jorge wears orthopedic shoes, attends first grade, and can walk, run and play. His physical therapist helps his parents do exercises at home. Another surgery is anticipated for 2014. Jorge is a little angel-boy who has touched the hearts of many.



Shirley is a highly motivated 6th grader who manages to get all A's and B's, despite her severe hearing loss as a child. A Managua audiologist and clinic reduced their prices by half and Project Opportunity contributed \$230 so that Shirley's single mother could purchase this hearing aid.

Dental Program - in its 4th year!



The Project Opportunity dental program has become a welcome tradition. This year, again with 400 generously donated toothbrushes, we hired and trained 15 preschool mothers. At local preschools, the mothers individually taught over 200 children. They worked with parents and educators as well, to ensure that children brush both at home and at school.



The dental hygiene mother helpers are encouraged to be punctual and responsible. They gain confidence and receive job recommendations, referrals and support to look for other work after their month with Project Opportunity.

Clínica Apolonia

Sadly, it's common to evaluate a 5-year-old's mouth and find multiple caries and deteriorated teeth. Poor nutrition, sweets and not brushing inevitably destroy teeth.

We are delighted to collaborate with Clínica Apolonia located in Dr. Jorge Olivas' simple home. Project Opportunity has provided cleaning, fluoride treatment and evaluations for 80 children and adults. We coordinate and share costs of the resulting treatment plan with the families.

With our efficient referral and feedback system as well as negotiated fair low prices - everyone is benefiting! This includes Jorge and his family. It's difficult to start a private dental practice, especially when most consider emergency extractions as the only affordable treatment.



Dr. Jorge, his wife Sandra and daughter Ariana (4 years old) help little José tolerate his 7 fillings, 2 extractions and 2 root canals over multiple visits (total cost: \$42). Saving his teeth is important for oral health in the future.



A play area, patience, loving gentleness, and small rewards all help to achieve difficult treatments.

¡Salva una vida! (Save a Life!) Classes



Preschool teachers Mercedes and Juana practice the Heimlich Maneuver - a necessity when children swallow small objects.

In 2012, Kate developed our *¡Salva una vida! (Save a Life!) Program*, a 2-hour hands-on class teaching CPR and the Heimlich Maneuver to save children and adults. This year Project Opportunity trained and hired Pio Romero to teach more classes. He does an excellent job. We've had classes with teachers, bus drivers, restaurant workers, families and community groups. So far in 2013, over 100 people have participated in this fun and very important class. We are seeking funding to maintain the *¡Salva una vida! Program*.

Accidents and emergencies are common in Nicaragua. Many locals we encounter tell us of a family member or neighbor who died of asphyxia (choking), a drowning, or an accident involving vehicles, motor cycles or bicycles.



Pio Romero teaches restaurant workers CPR using infant and adult mannequins.

Collaborations help get the job done!

After 5 years and many visible accomplishments, Project Opportunity has developed an impressive track record. Other nonprofits see the quality and scope of our efforts and want to help with community projects. Leveraging our talents in proposal writing, networking, facilitating community involvement and construction management - we gain the respect of other organizations who then contribute so that we all may better achieve shared goals.



This protective fence/wall/serpentina around the preschool has been a community goal since the school was built. Now children can play safely outside and school supplies are secure inside.



Here Deborah, David and Kate share the grand accomplishment with key contributor, the Nicaraguan Children's Friendship Committee, an NGO from San Francisco (ncfckids.org). Pictured 5th from L is Veronica Sanchez, NCFC director. Local community leaders and preschool parents collaborated as well.



Project Minnesota-León, a sister state nonprofit, purchased some materials for the fence project. Meredith Wardlaw (coordinator) and Orlando Sarria of PML view the early progress. (mn-leon.org)

Meet Project Opportunity Scholarship Students



Lester Gutiérrez is 17 years old and a new scholarship student. He is confident, highly motivated and smart. In November 2012, he passed La Salle's challenging entrance exam. As a new student in this demanding private school, he is working incredibly hard to adapt and catch up. His mother supports his family of 5 making and selling tortillas. Lester often gets up at 3AM to grind the corn into flour and on weekends sells tortillas at the market. His success is a total family effort. Lester's tuition, uniforms, books, supplies, school activities and tutoring cost \$1200 per year.



Scarleth Blanco is 14 years old, in 9th grade and very dedicated and bright. She is a top student. 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 is now in her third year at Colegio Asunción, one of the best private Catholic schools in León. This year, she's learning to play the xylophone and will participate in the school marching band. Her tuition, uniforms, books, tutoring and expenses cost \$1000 per year.



Moises Daniel Reyes is in second grade at Nueva Jerusalen, a small private evangelical school close to his home. He attends with his younger brother Jorge. Earlier this year he suffered daily bullying, both on the way to school and at school. Our coordinator, David, helped his parents effectively intervene. Now Moises Daniel is much happier, smiles more and is able to focus on his studies. All school expenses for the year will be \$350.



Yaren Belén Bravo Blanco is 10 years old and in 4th grade. Unlike her older sister Scarleth, Belén struggles to learn and remember. Project Opportunity is providing 4 hours of tutoring each week with a certified primary teacher as well as weekly visits by our coordinator and community psychologist, David. Belén is a sensitive child and responds well to creative and supportive approaches to learning. The cost for tutoring for the year is \$300.



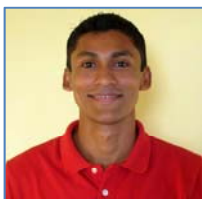
Jorge Reyes started first grade at Nueva Jerusalen in February 2013. The public primary school is located about twice as far away, 4 miles from his home. Because of the rehabilitation of his club feet, traveling long distances every day is a significant barrier. While in casts, Jorge enthusiastically learned his numbers and letters during months of David's home visits. He chose a Spiderman backpack for his school supplies and is an eager student. His school expenses will total \$350.



Rosemary Garcia loves school and learning. She is 12 years old and only in the 4th grade. This is due to her profound hearing impairment and difficulties getting to school in the past. She attends a special public school, Nuevos Horizontes, where classes are in sign language. Unfortunately, the school is an hour by bus from her home. Her family lacks the resources to consistently pay bus fare and other school expenses. Project Opportunity has helped her get supplies and uniforms to begin the year and we are paying a portion of her transportation costs each month (total cost - \$300).



Larry Ramos is 18 and in his second year at the national university (UNAN) in their degreed Nursing Program. He chose nursing over becoming a physician because "I want to have more direct human contact with patients and help them *both* physically and emotionally." Since their father's death 2 years ago, the family has struggled economically. Because of his financial need and high grades, he earned a tuition waiver. Project Opportunity pays for his practicum materials (stethoscope, uniforms, etc.) and will pay other academic expenses. Cost for the year is \$500.



José Carlos Ortega is an ambitious 21 year old who is working hard in his second Project Opportunity scholarship year. He attends a dual program that provides vocational training in tourism as well as a high school education and diploma. His dream is to attend the university and get a degree in business. When Jose gets overwhelmed with his many classes or family problems, he seeks counsel from David. Along with the cost of math tutoring, his educational expenses are \$600 for the year.

Each student is supported according to his or her individual needs and style. We review exams and grades each month, provide encouragement and counseling, and facilitate tutoring when needed. Our coordinator, David Jirón, is engaged with each student and family - he becomes a positive force in each young person's life.

We're piloting yet another new idea...



Many of the parents we work with have not completed their primary education and are unemployed or only sporadically employed. Local factory jobs and microcredit programs require a 6th grade diploma. These parents also have difficulty helping their young children with homework and often lack the confidence to engage with personnel at their children's schools.

The 4 adults pictured above have classes 2 afternoons each week with certified teacher Marjorie Hernández. They'll complete 6th grade by November, 2013. Project Opportunity organized, funded and now is overseeing this effort. Adult students Eduardo, Johanna, Hazel and Jorge are motivated, working hard and are *VERY* grateful. All previously believed they would never complete 6th grade and now have their sights set on high school.

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 friends and donors, 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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