



PRONiCA

News from Nicaragua

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CHILDREN LOSE LUNCH PROGRAM FUNDING

Lillian Hall, Program Coordinator

With heavy heart I write that one of the most important programs ProNica supports has lost funding. The lunch program which feeds 45 children 6 days a week at the Los Quinchos site in La Chureca, the Managua city dump, is at risk.

An amazing activist and retired social worker networked in her community and family to provide all the funds that sustained this project over the last several years. She collaborated with ProNica for nearly twenty years, providing a solid base of support for projects close to her heart, mainly related to children. Now at age 86, after a lifetime of service, she needs to dedicate her time to her husband as he struggles with terminal cancer. She can no longer continue carrying the burden of feeding these children.

It is now our turn. We all know the saying “it takes a village to raise a child.” It is time to take that to heart, to convert it from a quaint, feel-good saying into a commitment.

These are hard times in the US with the dark cloud of economic recession hanging over people’s heads. A former Nicaraguan resident who returned to her native Oklahoma, lamented about life in the US being “predominantly related to money: making it, spending it, saving it, worrying about losing it or not having enough of it.”

People are rightfully concerned about their mortgages, investments, and retirement. And yet, even with the recession, even with our financial fears and worries,

let’s remember how lucky we are to have sturdy homes, regular jobs, tenure, savings, workers compensation, unemployment, and disability. How lucky for many of us that we have families to depend on and know that regardless of what happens, we will never lack food or shelter, that we will never be on the streets.

What a contrast to the people of La Chureca. Day in and out they work under the brutal tropical sun to eke out a living from the waste of Managua’s 1.5 million people. Their clothes and homes are from garbage.



La Chureca children eat a nutritious lunch every day

Those in the US, who are NOT homeless or migrant farm-workers or incarcerated, are light years better off. Even with the economic troubles looming, we still have so much to be grateful for. Unlike the children of La Chureca, you and I are not in danger of losing our only meal of the day.

I think all of us, no matter how tight we feel things are getting, can help shoulder a tiny bit of the load of feeding those 45 hungry children. It takes only \$1.50 to provide a big plate of nutritious food and drink to each child. Surely, we can all do this together.

A million thanks to the Dekalb Central American Fund for Human Development for the many years of financial support of this life-saving project. I believe as one door closes, another opens.

Now, that depends on you and me. 100% of all donations marked “La Chureca” go to the feeding program. □

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ProNica's mission is to assist in creating and sustaining programs by and for the Nicaraguan people. These projects should hold promise for grassroots growth, arise from Nicaraguan needs and tradition, and provide not only survival but also empowerment.

ProNica's priorities are on community cohesiveness and economic development, non-violence training, health, education, agriculture and women's empowerment. We seek to link Nicaraguan people with concerned individuals internationally to promote understanding and mutual action. Educating those who seek information or to be of service is also our mission.

Our work is accomplished by an international core of dedicated volunteers and staff who seek to embody Quaker principles of consensual decision making and action and respect for that of God in everyone. This service project arose from a deep concern over the international exploitation of the Nicaraguan people and resources and a wish to respond to that concern in practical and constructive ways.

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Bienvenidos

Lilly Cooper



As the new Quaker House Caretaker since December, I am very pleased to work with the quality folks associated with ProNica and to meet many other like-minded individuals.

I am slowly learning my way around Managua, a city with no street signs or street names. I am verrry slowly improving my Spanish. I get the chance to feel inadequate every day, and to empathize with those in the States who don't speak English very well.

After the *ranchito*, or patio roof, was recently rebuilt, the space is now clean and fresh. I hope to spruce up the garden, paint some furniture and generally make Quaker House as pleasant as possible within our budget. In solidarity with the Nicaraguan government program encouraging anyone with space to grow some of their own food, I am experimenting with growing tomatoes and herbs in our walled *ranchito*. Lillian brought some heirloom seeds from the States. Time will tell whether there is enough sun.

Monday through Friday during the day I teach one hour of intensive English at an American NGO that is conducting research to create a vaccine for dengue fever. I have seven students - all computer geeks except for the one *doctora*.

Quaker House is either chaos (when full) or solitude (without guests). I appreciate both. I look forward to greeting visitors. Come soon.

As we say in Nicaragua..... *chao!*

ProNica thanks our faithful financial donors for your continued support. Together we can make a difference in the lives of our Project Partners and their communities of service.

Empowering Nicaraguans to empower themselves

La Chureca Testimonials

... As we drove into La Chureca, “home” to hundreds of desperate people, no one looked up at the car full of *gringos*, foreigners. Women and girls urgently chased garbage trucks to prostitute themselves for some morsel. Men dug through things so despicable I feel pompous to even try to describe it. This required all of their attention...

I saw a man eat something - unsure what, but nothing I'd call food - and I realized what they were digging. They desperately dug for survival. These are the people the world has thrown away. I could barely stand to look out the car window. It was hopeless, it was shameful. It was hell on earth....

When we arrived at the feeding site, very reluctantly I got out of the car. The smell punched me in the face. My eyes stung and teared. A child, who might have thought I was crying, took my hand and led me into the play area. Dozens of children wore rags but they played with brand new puzzles, balls, jump ropes, jacks, and chalk. A nurse tenderly dressed lesions and infected sores and made sure hands were clean before lunch was served...

I saw adults pillaging in the distance. I smelled decades' worth of rotting garbage. To me, this was the worst place in the world. I came to realize that these children laughed, sang, played, shared, ate, and refrained from glue-sniffing (for the moment, at least) while they were in the enclave's respite. For them, this was the best place in the world...

Here, they find a sliver of a regular childhood. I pray, with tear-filled eyes and a shaking heart, that they are not denied the one positive thing, the one glimmer of hope, and only vision of life beside the dump, that they have in the world. This program is extremely important, not only to these children, but to all of us who live in, and have created, this world.

When children starve, prostitute themselves, or lose an arm to untreated infections, we all lose.

Dina Rubey, Bryn Mawr

###

...As a ProNica volunteer last summer, I visited and met the children at the feeding project in La Chureca. This is a vital service. Were it not for the food served there, these children would have no other nutritious meal that day. These

children, like all others throughout the world, are bright, intelligent, curious, and fun-loving. As a result of their birth place, they are at a severe disadvantage. The financial support that was provided over the years has impacted each and every child in a positive way.

Jane Seymour, Haverford

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... La Chureca is a vital project. While there are many NGOs and governmental organizations that intermittently provide services to children at La Chureca, the Quinchos project is unique in its consistency and longevity. It is also unique because it is not located on the outskirts of the dump. It is in the middle of La Chureca, in the midst of the garbage trucks and squalor, in plain view and easily approachable. Children gather daily at the site not only for a meal, but for the safe haven the small shelter provides. Children find refuge from the toxic atmosphere of the dump. They find comfort, community, and support. Children are encouraged to work on their homework as well; I helped children work on simple arithmetic problems and spelling exercises.

Jessie Rubin, Fulbright Scholar

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...Last November our Rotary group from Nipigon Ontario visited the La Chureca lunch program. Our group brought school supplies and toys and helped serve a nutritious lunch. Every speck of food disappeared into their mouths in record time. These children are hungry.



new uniforms mean schooling for these Chureca kids

Our hearts broke to see how these children live, but because of this lunch program they are able to do crafts, play with the balls and just be kids for a couple of hours. They enjoy juice and a substantial meal. We were so impressed with the program that we are now sponsoring these very children. Our Rotary group raised enough funds to buy school uniforms and supplies for forty of these kids so they could attend school...

Connie Larson, Nipigon Rotary

###

...I've visited La Chureca three times since 2007. Each time, staff people cooked food; children washed and prepared to eat. In the midst of what can only be described as Dante's inferno, is this oasis, a place where children find refuge. It is a beacon of light and hope. Those who keep it going are inspiring for their perseverance, optimism, and providing sustenance for so many children day in and day out. This is a project that seeks to do as much as possible. And then some more...

Paul Susman, Bucknell University □

Library Matching Fund\$

Lillian Hall

A chance meeting at a local Managua bookstore became a wonderful opportunity to obtain greatly-needed books and new computers. While in line at the Hispamer Bookstore with Quinchos librarian Ivania Garcia, a Nicaraguan man asked if I worked with a group that supports libraries.

When he learned about ProNica-supported libraries, he explained that he works with a group called *Libros para la Vida* (Books for Life). They help libraries obtain books and computers through a matching grant program. If a group buys \$2,000 dollars worth of books from Hispamer for a struggling community library, Books for Life pays for another \$3,000 dollars worth of books for that same library, plus throws in two brand new computers with printers.

Since Hispamer is the only large bookstore in Nicaragua, ProNica has always bought our libraries' books there. The answer was clear. Yes. We will join Books for Life and Hispamer to get more books for less money. Hence,

the major donation from Jeanne Nash of the Fort Collins Quaker Meeting went even further. It has enabled the Quinchos association for ex-streetchildren to get more books which can now be distributed among their different sites, not just at their central library.

Octavio Robleto of *Libros para la Vida* has extended this offer to other ProNica-supported libraries. When we receive \$2,000 in donations earmarked for libraries, yet another small, community library will have the chance to get a total of \$5,000 worth of books - plus computers. This is an enormous gift for any of our other libraries.

We are very excited about this wonderful offer and thank Octavio and *Libros para la Vida* for bringing the love of reading to children across Nicaragua.

To support Books for Life, please send your tax-deductible donation to ProNica, earmarked "libraries." □

A Little Does a Lot

Liz Page Stitzel, Sarah Lawrence College student

I'm a senior at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville NY and in the summer of 2008, I volunteered in La Chureca. I heard many descriptions, mostly the 'worst or saddest place' anyone has ever seen. About the physical surroundings, these are complete understatements. As I spent more time in 'the dump,' the background faded and all I saw were the kids.

Everyday as we drove in, hoards of children yelled for *tarea*, or homework. Before lunch I helped teach basic math and writing. About noon, lunch was served and then the afternoon was spent playing.

These kids are absolutely remarkable. They are intelligent, loving, artistic and eager to learn. My experience last summer opened my eyes to a very different world from where I grew up in Vermont. These kids opened my heart to a new way of thinking.

As we recently learned, the funding for this lunch program is gone. For many of these children, this is their only decent meal and their time at the site is their only time away from helping their parents to pick through garbage. They actually can be kids while at the safe site.



\$1.50 = one nutritious meal for one child
\$60 = 40 meals a day
\$360 = 6 days a week
\$18,720 = one year

I know that in the current economy it is hard to think of donating money, but I also believe that if we all do a little, a lot can be accomplished. I am organizing a few fundraisers on my campus and a direct mail campaign of my friends to raise some money. I am asking everyone to send \$20 - basically one movie or a burger and a beer - to ProNica tagged for La Chureca.

This might not seem like much money, but if I convince 30 people to send \$20 and some of them get others to send \$20 - well, it adds up! Together we can keep this important program alive.

I assure you, these kids are worth it! □

*Share the abundance with those most needy
Your tax deductible donation supports Nicaraguan projects*

Chicken Bus

Caroline Rhoads, Eckerd College student

Public transportation is common in Nicaragua. It is also common to find chickens riding on the top of the bus, hence the phrase, Chicken Bus. On our many adventures in Nicaragua we traveled by public transportation. Chicken buses are old yellow school buses from the United States with racks on top to transport



chickens, furniture, groceries or even passengers. There is a bus driver and another who goes around collecting the bus fare. Normally there is one collector, but once there were three men collecting the fare. There is no limit to how many people the bus can hold; we were all crammed in.

If you are lucky you might sit with only one other person, but at times, we sat three to a seat. And then a fourth might wedge in. I decided it is more comfortable with three or more people because we bounced less. The one bad thing

was that we tended to break out in a full-body sweat - an extra bonus riding the chicken bus.

Another bonus is eating peanuts. Vendors board buses to sell peanuts, drinks, plantains, and stickers. We had two different entertainers on one trip; a young boy singing with his guitar, and a man preaching the Word of God. The people of Nicaragua use the buses as their store and stage. Public transportation gives Nicaraguans more jobs than just a driver and fare collector. Buses provide customers for vendors, while also serving as a stage for artists.

I was warned to keep my belongings close to my side and I never had a problem. Once, however, I sat next to a boy whose hat was stolen right off his head right through the open window, which was more humorous than upsetting.

For a little culture and a bumpy ride, I suggest spending all day on the bus. The people you will meet and the things you will see may be more interesting than anything else you planned. Bus riding teaches a lot about the Nicaraguan culture and its environment. □

Delegation Reflections

Lucas Benjamin, Eckerd College student

When our delegation arrived in Managua and hopped on the bus to Quaker House, I held my breath from the smell of burning garbage and car exhaust. I hadn't anticipated such a polluted and smoggy welcome. I realized I'm an over-privileged North American who wished to not dirty up my precious, pristine lungs. I felt disgusted and asked myself, "What makes me worthier than these people to be privileged with clean air and clean clothes and fresh food and a safe place to sleep?" They are just as worthy. Faced with this internal conflict, I humbled myself and attempted to never appear ungrateful.

Our visits to La Chureca, the Jubilee Women's sewing co-op, the Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs shifted my perspective. Contrasting my life with so many lives just as deserving of the things I take for granted, I now want less. I'm challenged to shed my lack of recognition for what I should be constantly thankful.



Eckerd College Delegation January 2009

Our homestays in El Limón was another humbling experience. Their simple ways of living in unity and cooperation was truly inspiring. My host father and community leader explained how the village works together and is stronger for it.

After living in such simplicity, I will now reconsider how and where I choose to live. It sounds farfetched in our modern, industrial society but truly I would be happier living in similar conditions to those in El Limón than living in a large and wasteful city. El Limón taught me that it is possible and practical to live with a small, connected group of families and establish a greater sense of community to provide for all.

See *Delegation* pg 6

Learning all about Nicaragua's history and culture was important but our community service was just as important and rewarding. I first thought our work wouldn't really be much benefit, but I realized it wasn't about how much we did, but how we did it. Working side-by-side showed both groups that despite our different habits and cultures, we worked together to accomplish a greater good. I feel closer to some of the people in El Limón than some of my friends back home.

Nicaragua affected me in ways I never imagined. □

ProNica hosts student delegations for 2 weeks, living and working with Nicaraguans in village communities



Delegation service project

A Circus Christmas

Herb Haigh

An ancient, smoke-belching, recently-hand-painted white bus squealed to a stop in front of Quaker House with all the commotion of a freight train. I always wondered what US prison busses were like. From every open or missing window peered a curious child. These prisoners of life are children from La Chureca, ages from a few months to about thirteen, whose location of birth left them in impoverishment.



La Chureca is not a town. It is a burning, smoking, mountain of stinking refuse about the size of a golf course. It is home to many of God's poorest people. It is estimated that more than a thousand souls live there. With a life expectancy of only thirty-five years, by default, most of them are children.



They sift through garbage for recyclables to sell or anything to eat. Women and children compete for "johns" who pay meager *cordóbas*.

The plan was to take 30 kids from La Chureca to a Christmas party with 40 children who live at Los Quinchos' San Marcos farm. With presents, candy-filled piñatas, and a two-hour ride on unmarked mountain roads, then a thirty-minute walk through the rainforest with a horde of Spanish-speaking, affection-starved kids, my wife Pam and I celebrated Christmas.

All aboard the prison bus, I rode backwards perched on the warm engine cover facing 30 adorable urchins who grinned back at me. This year Santa wasn't the only one covered

in ashes and soot from head to foot. These 30 elves spend their life that way. None of the dashboard gauges worked. Because the starter doesn't work, we always parked on an incline. I thought, "Dash away, dash away, dash away all."

The Quinchos Pizza Parlor in San Marcos is a small restaurant and a vocational program for the kids who work rotating shifts, preparing dough and waiting tables. It's occupational training, puts money in their pocket, makes money for the school, and is the bakery for the Quinchos resident programs. I heard it is the best pizza in town, population maybe a hundred. But, somehow we were served bologna sandwiches?!

The party included soccer, dancing, piñatas, smiles, laughs, and lots of presents - which required batteries. What a grandfatherly feeling as the Quinchos director Carlos and I put batteries into toys. Long lines of children patiently waited to find out what their toy actually did once powered. Even though everyone seemed to enjoy the party, I felt something was lacking, something special, something holiday-worthy.

On the way, we had passed a traveling Mexican Circus. To honor the recent death of my friend's son, I was Led by the Spirit to take 30 beautiful orphans to the Circus!

What a look on the ticket-taker's face as he counted the long line of excited ragamuffins behind us. A *gringo* couple taking 30 poor Nicaraguan kids to the Circus, and "*no hablan espanol!*" Shaking his head, he handed me a fist full of tickets and said, "God's love go with you."

Not only was it a treat to show these kids their first acrobats, magicians, and white tigers, but I hadn't imagined what else will stay with me forever.

Perhaps for the first time in their lives the children were in a large crowd. Of well-dressed people. Wearing shoes. That fit. These children live either outside or in small shacks without windows. Now they were inside the largest indoor space they had ever seen, a tent. It was magical! One little girl kept repeating, "big top, big top."

They kept running to the door to look outside and running back to their seats. We could only guess that being inside was such a new experience, they had to constantly reorient themselves. They experienced much more than a circus. They sat in their own seats. Legitimately. They hadn't conned anybody to get there. They hadn't snuck in. They hadn't stolen the tickets. No one was going to throw them out. They were free to enjoy the show. Just like everyone else. It was a dream.

We held back tears while they reminded us what we long

ago ceased to appreciate:

Explain cotton candy to one who relies on dogs to sniff out a morsel of food from garbage.

Why are people clapping their hands?

Where does the poop go when you flush a toilet?

What is a concession stand?

We were humbled to watch children follow the popcorn vender to grab and eat what fell to the floor as naturally as US kids eat McDonalds French fries. Thank the Lord for the blessings I received that day.

The circus over, we moved cautiously amongst the throng back to the prison bus. The Christmas celebration was now complete. A tiny 3-year-old girl, coughing every few minutes, fell asleep in my arms on the way home. I pray that she got well, and lived a better life.

Outside the dump, waiting parents claimed their children. *Adios* and *Gracias* and it was starkly, suddenly over. For now - Merry Christmas *muchachos*. Rest in peace my friend's son. God bless us every one. □

Friends Witness Tour 2009

Sarah Williamson

The 2009 Friends Witness Tour was a unique opportunity to learn about Nicaragua and visit various ProNica project partners. Lillian Hall shared invaluable insights regarding the country's history, culture and current economic conditions.

The trip was a testament to tireless efforts of all the Nicaraguans working to improve the lives of those in their communities. Everyday we met amazing people who dedicated themselves to providing life-changing services and support to those around them. One inspiring person is Alicia Huete, a midwife also known as "Mama Licha."

While Mama Licha worked for over three decades as a nurse, she still had much more to give. Her passion for improved maternal and child health prompted her to open her home as a clinic, providing free services to women regardless of the hour. Since those early days when she donned a headlamp to light pelvic exams in a small section off her kitchen, there is now a clinic behind her house. Here, she provides pap smears, biopsies, contraceptives, prenatal care, lactation advice, parenting classes, vaccines and medications.



3 Friends Witness Tourists

But the services she offers encompass far more. She also offers a safe space for women to talk and express their concerns and fears. In a country where going to an ill-equipped hospital often means dehumanizing treatment and misdiagnoses, the psychological impacts can be devastating. Mama Licha seeks to alleviate this trauma and empower women through treatment, and education. My favorite was her pap smear demonstration with a dried avocado and speculum. In a brightly-muraled building adorned with health posters, workshop photos, herbs, and books, she works to dispel myths and equip women with information they need and can share with others.

Word of mouth brings an ever-increasing number of women to her door, and her dream is to further expand services and touch more lives. She hopes to purchase a farm not only for wellness, birthing services, and advanced gynecology care, but also for learning and exchange. She envisions a place where international health professionals could work, midwifery students could gain hands-on experience, and visitors could take Spanish classes and learn more about the clinic.

Traveling with the Friends Witness Tour - meeting the visionaries who are already providing so much and yet keep finding ways to do more - was a true gift. □

CASA
CUA'QUERA



Panchita Fletes
in Managua, Nicaragua

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Quaker House has a fully equipped kitchen, and is convenient to shopping, internet cafes, banks and restaurants.

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- Monthly gifts provide enduring/sustaining support for ProNica's Project Partners.
- ProNica coordinates volunteers, work study delegations, Friends Witness Tours for groups of 4 to 6.

visit our website at www.pronica.org

Friends Witness Tour

10 days in August 2009

learn about Nicaraguan culture, economy, history
visit ProNica Project Partners

only \$750

includes all in-country transportation, lodging,
meals, and excursion entry fees

bring only souvenir money and your camera
airfare is lowest in recent years

for more information,

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Experience it Yourself



Your tax deductible financial support assists projects that feed children living in La Chureca, the Managua City dump. Muchas Gracias. Thank you.