



PRONiCA

News from Nicaragua

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Quakers Empowering Nicaraguans to Empower Themselves for 25 Years

Sowing Seeds of Goodness and Friendship

Carmen Gonzalez, ProNica Delegation Leader

Peasants ride into town on horseback to shop, children play in the church square, and women do their chores at a slow pace. In the afternoons people sit outside chatting with passing neighbors. There is no hurry in Achuapa, a small town in northwest

Nicaragua. This slow pace is why heart attack deaths are so rare, they can be counted on the fingers of one hand. If it weren't for the few cars here and there, a visitor would think that a time machine had returned him to the 19th century.



Tienda Campesina in Achuapa parking and sesame seed winnowing

In Achuapa, many people might not know the capital of the US. However, they do know ProNica and the good things done in love, care, and support for the poor here.

Juan Bravo is the founder of the Juan Francisco Paz Silva Cooperative, an association of farmers working together to achieve goals that would be difficult individually. He tells us about his first encounter with ProNica.

Juan Bravo: "It was in the 1990's that I met Thomas Loudon and Jennifer Atlee, a young couple working for ProNica. Tom was helping the nearby community of

Lagartillo after they were attacked during the Contra-Sandinista war. At the time, there were 76 members in our cooperative and our capital was \$500 dollars. When we opened an acupuncture clinic within the cooperative in

1995, Jenny helped us organize and ProNica gave the funds to start building the clinic.

"We needed the funding, yes, but the most important thing we have always received from ProNica has been the moral, human and technical support. Tom and Jenny helped us with decision making, and kept us company as a sign of their genuine solidarity. With them I learned that if we wanted development in our community we needed to create a different pattern of living."



ProNica: Had you ever heard about Quakers before ProNica?

Juan Bravo: "No, but Tom and Jenny told us. Thanks to them, I travelled abroad for the first time. I went to Philadelphia for a month, and there I met many Quakers. I was impressed by their good manners, tolerance, and respect towards other humans. I also admire Quakers

because whatever they do, they do extremely well. Tom told us about the absence of priesthood in the Quakers. I also learned that any Quaker can

see Sowing on page 2

25 years - Quakers Empowering Nicaraguans to Empower Themselves

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ProNica's Mission is building sustainable cross-cultural relationships between the peoples of Nicaragua and North America using Quaker values.

ProNica's Vision is solidarity that empowers and educates Nicaraguans and North Americans.

ProNica assists in creating and sustaining programs by and for the Nicaraguan people. These projects 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, sustainable agriculture and women's empowerment. We seek to link Nicaraguan people with concerned individuals internationally to promote understanding and mutual action. We educate those who seek information or wish to serve.

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 in practical and constructive ways.

ProNica, Incorporated is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt corporation under the spiritual care of the Southeastern Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) with offices in St. Petersburg, Florida and Managua, Nicaragua. ProNica is a registered Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Nicaragua.

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Sowing from page 1 express his/her thoughts freely, and speak in front of others.

“In Philadelphia I visited an Amish community. It was wonderful to see how these people live in tune with nature, respecting the earth, as our ancestors did. I keep thinking that we should adopt some of their farming techniques.

“Along the years ProNica has helped us with different projects. Such as, a potable water project, helping us build the Tamagas Farm infrastructure, and in the creation of the Achuapa International Music Festival.”

ProNica: Has the cooperative prospered since the 1990s?

Juan Bravo: “It certainly has. Nowadays there are 283 members, both men and women; we are running several social projects, have built water systems, and several community centers; we are also running environmental projects, and productive development projects. We have gone a long way since we started right after the end of the Sandinista Revolution, because do you know what? We started as a shop selling basic food such as rice and beans at a fair price and we managed to regulate the price of basic food in town. Nowadays, we serve our community in different ways. For instance, we process our farmers' sesame seeds for the organic oil and sell it to The Body Shop now owned by L'Oreal. At present we are exporting 100 tons of oil a year, which is quite an achievement, because it is not easy to meet the standard of quality required in the first world.”

ProNica: What does Achuapa need in these days?

Juan Bravo: “We need to create alternatives so that people stop emigrating to other countries. Most of the young who manage to go through university leave Achuapa in search of a better future in Costa Rica, Guatemala, the US or Spain. Those who stay in Achuapa start to rely on the money transfers from their relatives abroad. What do they do with this money? Most of them squander it. Our challenge at present is to persuade them to put their money to good use so that they learn how to contribute to progress.”

ProNica: And ProNica?

Juan Bravo: “ProNica is always there, bringing delegations of North American students to our town, and keeping close as it has always been. ProNica is happy to see us walking on our own feet, and we are forever grateful to ProNica for walking hand in hand with us, no matter what.” □

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Peacebuilding in the 1990s, ProNica History - Part II of III

Melissa Ajabshir, ProNica Executive Director

Ten years and fifty thousand casualties later, the Contra War was over. “Mothers can once again fret over finding shoes for their adolescent sons instead of worrying about their very survival,” ProNica coordinator, Jon Roise wrote in 1991. International agencies closed doors left and right when the war ended, but ProNica resolved to stay. Renewing our commitment, the SEYM/ProNica committee stated, “Friends working in and with Nicaragua seek to value the traditions and aspirations indigenous to the Nicaraguan people and to avoid the imposition of alien and arbitrary assumptions and methods. We feel keenly our debt to those people who have shown us what it means to persist, to take responsibility for society, to invent the strategies for survival.”

From the beginning, ProNica’s work was about relationships. Our hospitality house, Casa Cuáquera, was a welcoming base for solidarity workers, witness tours, peace volunteers, protest envoys and international delegations. And nearby was the hub of ProNica’s Nicaraguan operations, El Centro de los Amigos. There our dedicated volunteers and staff made meaningful, personal connections with grassroots Nicaraguan groups. With their guidance and solidarity, ProNica strategically funded the most promising and desperately needed projects.

Supporters from across the globe made the work possible, keeping the stateside office very busy. Clerk of the SEYM/ProNica committee, Ruth Hyde Paine, led the all-volunteer team in St. Petersburg, Florida. She worked with Jim Carlson on newsletters and Norman Malakoff on cargo shipments, all the while garnering and inspiring a new generation of ProNica supporters. In addition, Ruth regularly traveled to Nicaragua to ensure smooth operations at all levels of the organization. She was truly the glue that kept the stateside and Nicaraguan branches working in concert toward a singular mission.



AVP workshop notes on a tree

Back in Nicaragua, many who had fled to Miami during the 1980s Contra War returned, expecting their former land. The new government supported them, and many campesinos (peasant farmers) were displaced. In 1991 an 850-acre farming cooperative lost 2/3 of its land including their schoolhouse. For a year the teachers improvised, and the children studied outdoors. Upon reading of their plight, ProNica supporters rallied. Over the next year patrons sent in the more than eight thousand dollars, and the El Cañon School opened in February 1993 with 150 students.

In the 1990s Nicaragua had the most foreign debt of any Central American nation. For every dollar spent on education or health care, five dollars went to paying down the debt. By 1992 unemployment had skyrocketed to 60%, and with it came hunger.

Clinics that ProNica backed reported young patients with “bloated bellies, spindly legs, parched hair and dull eyes.” In response, our supporters marked their generous checks for SoyNica, a group that rapidly trained mothers to turn edible green leaves (yucca, chaya and ayote) into a pulp whose extract was highly effective in treating malnutrition.



Women’s chicken project

ProNica sponsored AVP (Alternatives to Violence Project) workshops in Nicaraguan prisons in the 1990s. While incarcerated at Modelo Prison in 1994, Carlos Zelaya participated and later wrote, “The experience completely changed my life... The impact the workshop had on me is indescribable, and I’m sure each of the prisoners who participated were deeply moved by the experience.”

Motivated by his personal transformation, upon release he immediately contacted ProNica coordinator, Marc Forget, trained as a facilitator and went on to conduct AVP workshops at prisons throughout Nicaragua.

Solidarity workers from the war days, Jenny Atlee and Tom Loudon, stayed through the mid-1990s in service to the mountain community of Achuapa. They offered expertise in agriculture and natural medicine and advocated on behalf of the community to ProNica and other funding sources. As a result, ProNica contributed a windmill that brought

See *Peacebuilding* on page 4

Peacebuilding from page 3 desperately needed water to the area. Our generous donors then sponsored

the Peasant Women in Poultry group who placed their chickens into a shared range and hen house to increase productivity. Next came an acupuncture clinic and a library. But perhaps most importantly ProNica helped finance the cooperative's transition to organic sesame seed crops as world market trends changed. The high quality of the cooperative's sesame oil garnered a fair trade contract with The Body Shop for sesame oil.

After five years of mobile medical outreach in the Acahualinca slum, the doors of the Acahualt Women's Center opened in 1996, and ProNica coordinator Del Hegarty alerted supporters. News of the Acahualt cancer prevention and detection program led to generous contributions for pap smears and prevention workshops. In the first year, three cases of cervical/uterine cancer were detected from pap smears, all early enough for treatment. Next Del turned supporters' attention to cries for family planning from the women in the barrio. ProNica patrons sent enough funding so that tubal ligations and vasectomies could be offered year round. By the late 1990s, Acahualt added a library and preschool that functioned as nurturing havens to children whose single mothers' supported them by scavenging the dump. Our patrons provided both programs with shelves, books and educational supplies.

American nurse, Dorothy Granada said that she "dropped out of the middle class in 1980 in order to live more simply and to free up more time for peace and justice work." Thankfully that work landed her in Nicaragua in the mid 1980s where she established a desperately needed clinic in the impoverished community of Mulukuku. ProNica was a proud sponsor of the Mulukuku Clinic throughout the 1990s, and Dorothy's courageous service to the Nicaraguan people earned her the Pfeffer International Peace Prize in 1998.

In the early 1990s there were an estimated 17,000 children living on the streets of Managua, when Italian activist, Zelinda Roccia opened Los Quinchos. A volunteer described Zelinda's early work, "When she first approached them in the marketplaces where they hang out, inviting them to meals, they pitched rocks at her. But some found out that this incredibly good news was for real. Soon she was feeding 20 of them, and she could open the door and 70 more would push

in, with 100 still outside." Zelinda and the Quinchos team set out to integrate these fragile youngsters into nurturing communities. By 1995



Acahualinca's first library - a push cart!

they had opened four homes for boys. In 1998, program coordinator in Nicaragua, Lillian Hall, alerted ProNica supporters to Los Quinchos' critical work. Enough was raised to build a new carpentry and hammock workshop by beautiful Lake Granada and to assist funding projects at the Yahoskas in San Marcos, the new girls' home.

Many inspired ProNica supporters wanted to visit the projects they read about in the newsletters, so ProNica organized Friends Witness Tours. Librarian and social activist Jeanne Nash wrote about her 1995 tour that included six members aged 21 to 81, "I'm home from Nicaragua and the sights and sounds and statistics fill my mind... In a world where wars and disasters are never in short supply, Nicaragua hangs on

by its fingernails, out of the news, and hoping for a better future... It's been said that Nicaragua is a country of poets and warriors... Wouldn't it be wonderful to see the poets outnumber the warriors?" Touching accounts like Jeanne's were heard over and over from those who went. Artist and professor Peg Rigg was so galvanized by her first Friends Witness Tour that she returned seven more times.



Unloading shipping container in Managua

Some, however, wanted more immersion: to roll up their sleeves, serve and learn. So ProNica organized a volunteer program.

With a minimum of a six month commitment, volunteers were matched with project partners and host families

in accordance with skills, abilities and interests. A 1999 volunteer Taleigh Smith described why she chose ProNica for her volunteer service, "We have a responsibility to rebuild healthy relationships with people, and contribute to a new society based on equality and peace, rather than exploitation and violence. ProNica seemed to have a well-developed consciousness as to its international role. I liked its effort not to start its own projects, but rather to support ones that are locally run and congruent with the Quaker philosophy of non-violence and sustainable development." Volunteer endeavors ran the gamut from

midwifery to agriculture to information technology. Volunteers Adrean Sheid and Matthew Paulus even managed ProNica's Nicaragua operations for a period when there was a gap between coordinators.

The Florida office had no shortage of its own exceptional volunteers. In 1995 they launched the 16th and final 40-foot shipping container of material aid. The decision to stop was made because most of the third party shippers that offset the fixed costs had dropped out. Stateside staff reflected, "The Shipping Project, born during the US embargo of Nicaragua, fired imaginations [and] energized volunteers..." Norman Malakoff, the maverick community activist who initiated the project and coordinated the massive efforts for nine years was there at the finish line, helping unload the last container in Managua. It was a fitting end to a remarkable decade-long undertaking.



Ruth Hyde Paine, Ann Stillman, Jim Carlson in stateside office

After a decade with volunteers running the stateside office, a paid position was very needed. Ann Stillman, who had shared the SEYM/ProNica co-clerk position with Ruth for three years, was hired as part-time stateside coordinator. Ruth noted Ann's "clear and candid analysis of issues." Then in 1997 Ann left to care for her mother after her father's death.

Lin Jorgensen, who had spent four years on the SEYM/ProNica committee replaced her, bringing an artist's flair and powerful grant-writing skills. As the new coordinator, she reflected on a trip to Nicaragua, "...realizing how blessed I am to be someone who wants to help rather than someone who needs help." In 1997 Lin took a job at Eckerd College, and Ken Kinzel was hired in her place. He had significant experience

from American Friends Service Committee and was a gifted photographer who captured Nicaragua's beauty on visits there. In 1999, Ken ushered ProNica into the 20th century with our very own web site.

Former Nicaragua coordinator Marc Forget aptly summarized ProNica's unique position in Nicaragua during the 1990s, "We support our partners in ways that large funding agencies cannot. Having a continuous presence dedicated mostly to maintaining a close relationship with our partners is a great benefit to them. We are here when funds are needed for an emergency, we promote international exchange by bringing foreign visitors to the projects, we attend our partners' general meetings, social functions and their projects' inaugurations, and we expose our partners to new potential funding sources. We act as conduit for grants from other sources as well. Having a personal relationship with our partner organizations allows us to better understand their everyday needs, help them find solutions to problems, and offer moral support on an ongoing basis. The resulting cultural exchange is a benefit to all involved." □

The less glamorous but vital administrative work in the stateside office was ever increasing. In 1996 Ruth Hyde Paine wrote, "We began ten years ago, a volunteer crew of defenders of human

*The
Ruth Hyde Paine Fund
supports women's health.
To support this
and other projects,
on your checks to ProNica
mark the memo line
accordingly.*

rights... We wanted to do something tangible. We now have a very effective organization with a clear mission and skills delivering aid to very well-run projects in Nicaragua."

2012 Project Support Fundraising

In October, ProNica Project Partners submit grant requests for the following year. We expect at least ten requests for projects such as library books; medical supplies and procedures; agricultural seeds and tools; utilities and office supplies; and printing, materials and transportation for health education outreach. The December newsletter will list incoming 2012 requests.

Please help ProNica support our Nicaraguan project partners as they empower themselves. □

NICARAGUA, Surviving the Legacy of US Policy

As Witness for Peace worker from 1985-1990, photographer Paul Dix documented images of Nicaraguans affected by the war. He returned in 2002 with Pam Fitzpartick and found 30 of those he'd photographed earlier. In this book, they share their stories in over 100 photographs. \$34.95 - order your copy from <http://www.NicaraguaPhotoTestimony.org> or send a check to Just Sharing Press, P.O.Box 948, Eugene OR 97440. Profits are shared with ProNica. □

Peg Rigg in Memoriam

Herb Haigh, ProNica President of the Board of Directors

I have a small stone in the glove compartment of my car. There is nothing special about its appearance and it's not a pet rock, but I love it just the same. It is the perfect stone to skim across a pond, but I would never do that because it was a gift to me from Margaret "Peg" Rigg.

One evening I was visiting with Peg and as I was leaving, she urgently said, "wait!" I thought something dreadful had happened so I stopped suddenly and as I did, she picked up a stone and said, "Here, I want you to have this." She was "just being Peg," and she wanted me to have something to remember her by: as if I could ever forget her.

As an artist, calligrapher, and designer Peg clearly understood and taught others that art was not simply a gift but a spiritual endeavor; a talent given to a few by a power greater than ourselves that should be shared with others. She was Quaker and her instructions were to "go cheerfully through life, seeking that of God in every person." Everyone loved her, because she was the personification of those words. The light of the spirit shone brightly through her in so many ways.



Peg delivers 3,000 condoms to Acahualinca Women's Clinic in February 2010

Peg was a part of ProNica from the beginning. In fact, the deeply ingrained tradition of capitalizing the "N" in ProNica was Peg's idea, and so was the logo that has always been our banner.

Peg gave of her talent and treasure generously. It would require many pages to list it all, but one story tells it best.

Peg was in her eighties, forgetful and frail, but still a beautiful woman. You never failed to notice her. She was also quirky; so quirky that when someone donated three thousand condoms Peg volunteered to carry them on a witness trip to Managua. She couldn't wait to see the faces of the inspectors when they opened her luggage! We had such fun preparing explanations for her: "Doesn't everyone carry three thousand condoms in their suitcase?" "I am expecting a busy weekend" and on and on. Although her bag was never opened, who cannot wonder what became of those condoms, or maybe not.

We will miss you Peg, we will miss you very much, and that little stone will stay where I can find it for as long as I can keep it. □

August Friends Witness Tour

Kristin Finkbeiner & Christina Orchard

As students at Quaker Wilmington College, we had different expectations from what we found. Instead of instability and danger, we felt a sense of unity, as if everyone belonged. A Folklore Ballet at the national theatre demonstrated how culture is integrated into Nicaraguan society from birth (a foreign concept to North Americans). The Lagoon de Apoyo and the active Masaya volcano showed the natural beauty.

Both the Casa Materna and Mama Licha focus on women's health and safety, especially pregnancy. The children of La Chureca and Los Quinchos brought light to our hearts,

not just by their simple lifestyle, but their happiness to make the best out of it.

We saw both sides of the story - those who start with nothing and receive opportunity through education, trade, cultural music and dance. US children are socially blinded to these elements that make a society thrive. We must learn to appreciate the small things in life, slow down, and understand it's not how much money you make or your status, but your personal relationships and the lives you impact. Nicaraguans embrace relationships and Nicaragua is not poor. Though exploited, this country is abundant in resources and love. These are the important elements of life. □



Musical Chairs

After six fulfilling years of service to ProNica, Davida Johns must step aside for family reasons. As a former Peace Corps Volunteer, she knows the good work of ProNica happens because of the Quaker ideals of partnership and empowerment. Melissa Ajabshir steps into a leadership roll in the stateside office as Executive Director. As Davida becomes her part-time assistant; they literally switch chairs. □

Growing Young People

Jim Spickard, University of Redlands Professor of Sociology & Anthropology

World Hunger and International Development was our class focus. In Nicaragua, we had many opportunities to understand personally what that meant. On campus we learned about hunger, poverty, international aid and development, some grassroots solutions of recent years, and socio-political conflicts of the 20th century and their economic and social causes. Lillian Hall's stories of her work for the Agriculture Ministry during the 1980's revolution brought it alive in a way that mere book-learning can not. Likewise my in-class slideshow about the people living in the Managua city dump and the project for children there could not match the emotional impact of our actual visit. But it did prime the students for what we would see.



Delegates bake cookies in Rio Blanco

We visited a water filter plant, a worm compost operation, and a public health doctor from Christian Medical Action. An American intern in Mama Licha's clinic accompanied us on a visit to nature preserve, El Tiséy. Students related to her as their peer, learning what they might experience in their futures. Using local transportation is a core part of the Nicaraguan experience – true even for the 5-hour bus-ride-from-hell from Rio Blanco to Managua. The trip wouldn't be the same without it!

We learned that few members of the cooperative are experienced growing vegetables and that the land is not particularly good for growing basic grains. Thus, food is more of a problem than it first appears. There is room for considerable knowledge transfer. One student stayed on for two weeks as a volunteer on an organic farm on Ometepe Island.

I'm in the business of growing young people and this course fit that mold better than any I've taught. The combination of classroom-, book- and experiential-learning lead my students to a more mature, deeper and more reflective place. There's little more that a teacher could want.

It would not have worked so well had we not had ProNica's guidance, expertise, and contacts. The students particularly appreciated Carmen Gonzalez's cheerful attitude and her constant work on their behalf. They also appreciated Lillian's willingness to share her long history of activism and her insights into the current social and political situation. Bravo and thanks!

All's well that ends well. The trip was wonderful. □

Friends Witness 7-16 October 2011- still space for four

Join a small group for a life-changing experience, visit project partners, volcano crater lakes.

Only \$950 includes all in-country transportation, meals, lodging, excursion fees. Bring only your camera and souvenir money. Gather four friends and call now! □

*Thank you
for your continued
support to feed
hungry children*

A Life of Faithful Service

on behalf of the Casa Materna ambulance by Kitty Madden

I came to the Casa Materna in 1997 to transport women with high-risk pregnancies to the nearby hospital to assure their safe birthing. At first I was chagrined to not live the exciting life of sirens, bubble lights, and high speeds.

Many times, though, I have helped save lives, both of the Casa mothers and of occasional accident victims in the rural areas who needed quick transport to the hospital while we were doing outreach when the need arose. I also did double duty at the time of Hurricane Mitch in October 1998 getting needed aid to those in rural communities.

To date, I have transported over 13,100 mothers in labor. A few times mothers gave birth in the Casa Materna and my

stretcher came in handy to transport both mother and baby to the hospital.

Lately, however, I have begun to feel my age, 15 years. Though I have had regular check-ups, oil changes, new tires, and repairs, the staff worries about my increasing expense. They are reluctant to use me for rural areas or longer jaunts to Managua. I am no longer the youngster I once was.

Thus, though I hope to never fully retire (lots of you readers will understand), the Casa staff and I seek funds (dare I say it aloud?) for my replacement. If you are able to send something through ProNica, our faithful friends, know that we will all be most grateful. □

Casa Cuáquera



José and Panchita welcome you

Quaker House

Hospitality house offers travelers simple lodging in Managua. Located in a quiet residential neighborhood, convenient to shopping, banks and restaurants. Individuals, groups, meeting space, wifi, fully equipped kitchen or catering available.

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*In this issue, we share ProNica's development during the 1990s
In the next issue, the story continues into the future
With your help, ProNica continues to Empower Nicaraguans Empower Themselves*

Generous donors accept the challenge to fill the gap between resource and need

\$1.20 provides one nutritious lunch	\$1,200 provides food for one month
\$50 feeds 45 children one lunch meal	\$3,600 provides food for three months
\$300 feeds these children for one week	\$14,400 provides La Chureca children food for one year

Will you ease both burdens of affluence and poverty?

"I am blessed to be someone who wants to help rather than someone who needs help."

Lin Jorgensen wrote inside. See Peacebuilding article beginning on page 3.

How to support ProNica

- * Signup for automatic donations direct from your bank to ours - contact us for details
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- * Send a Gift of Life in memory of a person or event - ProNica sends a hand-calligraphied certificate acknowledging your financial donation



Proud Chureca girl in school uniform