



PRONiCA

News from Nicaragua

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Quakers in Solidarity with Nicaraguans for 25 Years

Leaders in Their Communities

Elizabeth Sirois, Washburn University Delegate

When I joined the group of Washburn University students going to Nicaragua, I wasn't sure what to expect. Sure, I had looked over the itinerary for the trip and read about Nicaraguan history, but beyond that I was going into those two weeks without a clue. What I found was an amazing community of people who saw needs around them and sought to fulfill them.

On a daily basis, we heard from men and women who started service programs in their communities. A majority were started by women - for women - as sexual health became a growing problem.

In Estelí, Mama Licha started a clinic where she teaches sexual health, gives care to pregnant women, acts as a midwife, and provides Pap smears. She told our group how the clinic began in her own home, and has since grown due to donations. She now has more resources to help her patients. In Matagalpa, we heard from the founders of Casa Materna, a similar program that was formed when women became aware of how high the death rates were

for pregnant women in rural areas. For two weeks prior to their delivery, these women stay at the Casa Materna where they minimize the risks through care and exercise.



Washburn delegation with Mama Licha

Another who saw a need in the community was Armando Ramirez. Despite the opposition of the 'machismo' culture among both men and women, Armando started the League of Men Against Violence, a program aimed at stopping domestic violence in the community. His program teaches ten youths in each community how to go against their 'machismo' upbringings in hopes that these youths would then spread their teachings further.

These pioneers made me realize how much effect a single person can have in

a community. They simply saw something around them that was not right and did what they could to fix it. I was truly inspired by how empowered they were. If the world had more people like them, people who are selfless, generous, who seek prosperity and equality for all, I can't begin to imagine the effect they could have. □

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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 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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Úsalo!

Paula Samuelsen, ProNica volunteer

Posters like the one below may seem a bit graphic, but Raquel and Janette, the health educators at the Acahualinca Women's Center, agree that strong messages are needed to raise awareness in the community about contraception and safe sex. Twenty-five percent of Nicaraguan girls experience a pregnancy before they turn 20 and a quarter of all babies in Nicaragua are born to teen mothers. The incidence of HIV/AIDS is on the rise in Nicaragua. Testing is not yet widespread and those diagnosed with HIV may be subject to prejudice. Sexually transmitted infections continue to be a problem, especially among the adolescent and young adult population. Strong messages, with a powerful visual component capable of capturing attention of those who don't read, are seen as an essential part of a multi-strategy effort by the Women's Center to inform and empower the Acahualinca community.



While it is recognized that education efforts need to be directed toward the male population, it's not easy to get young men to come to the *charlas* (informal talks) due to machismo attitudes. However, Janette and Raquel held a *charla* at a construction site in

the barrio where male workers showed an interest in the information about sexual and reproductive health and were appreciative of the free condoms (and the instructions for use – one participant even jotted down notes). □

ProNica Thanks

Doug McCown for his dedicated service to ProNica over the past dozen years. He served on the committee, board of directors, as treasurer, and as stateside co-coordinator. Having served two terms, Doug steps down from the board. Though Doug now lives in Maine, he plans to remain active on the committee. □



Acahualinca Promotoras

Paula Samuelsen, ProNica volunteer

Meet Raquel del Carmen Parales and Janette de los Angeles Zarate de Martinez, the dedicated health educators at the ProNica-supported Acahualinca Women’s Center. Both women grew up in Barrio Acahualinca and began their health education careers as *promotoras* (volunteer health workers). Promotoras provide advice and information about health issues on an informal basis. They also assist people by just listening and providing feedback on day-to-day worries and discomforts. Additionally, promotoras are healthcare liaisons, linking community to provider services.

Over the years Raquel and Janette received training from the doctors, nurses, and psychologists at Acahualinca Women’s Center. They also learned about being effective educators from the community members they have served and who value their contributions.

Now community health education professionals, they engage in a wide array of health promotion activities, addressing issues from condom use to domestic violence, and partner with other private and public health organizations that share similar goals.

Charlas (informal educational discussions held in homes, school rooms, or other community spaces) spread the word on preventive health. Participants are recruited by word of mouth. Janette and Raquel focus on one sector within the barrio where they connect with a community leader to arrange for a location. When they announce the charla to each person, word spreads quickly through the neighborhood.

Raquel is one of the founding members of Acahualinca Women’s Center staff. As a volunteer promotora, she worked along side Maria Elena, Norma, and Silvia during the nineties to address concerns with the alarming number of cervical and uterine cancer deaths in the Acahualinca barrio. In the early days of their campaign, they secured a cubicle in a house where a doctor performed Pap smears. The promotoras went door to door, informing women about cervical cancer screening and distributing certificates for free Pap tests. As the screenings became popular, the program expanded to include education on contraception and prevention of sexually transmitted infections. Health professionals at the Women’s Center provide training for the promotoras, emphasizing prevention and encouraging people to come to the clinic, while providing free services to those who are unable to pay. Raquel’s favorite charla is “parenting skills” for parents of

preschoolers. She is enthusiastic about raising awareness that children need attention and encouragement to succeed in school.

At present, Raquel’s greatest concerns are cervical cancer and domestic violence. She realizes that to make progress on these and other health problems, poverty needs to be addressed. Raquel has been involved in the Women’s Center job training efforts including the Acahualinca Beauty School which provides marketable skills to 20-30 women each year. Many of these women were sex workers who now have an alternative means of support.



Janette and Raquel

Janette also grew up in Acahualinca. As a young girl, she volunteered in the ProNica-supported Acahualinca library and preschool, where she’s still involved. As time went on, she became

more involved with health education work done by Women’s Center staff and became one of the early promotoras. She attributes her success to knowing the community as well as to her strong desire to share information that promotes health. Although she studied to become an accountant, five years ago she chose to become a full-time health educator at the Women’s Center. In addition to her dedication to empowering women in her community, she strives to help them improve their self esteem. She wants women to know their rights and live their lives free from domestic violence. Janette is optimistic about positive changes related to health in Acahualinca because efforts are being made to reach the young generation.

Janette has been learning about effective community health education for years and would love to study social work at the University of Central America’s Managua campus.

One of the most powerful strategies for global health promotion today is “primary prevention.” Community health education is one example of primary prevention and is a central component of the Acahualinca Women’s Center’s mission. Raquel and Janette are passionate about their work of informing and empowering community members. □

Sponsor a Promotora or Services at the Acahualinca Women’s Center

- \$5,600 annual salary for full-time Promotora
- \$2,800 annual salary for half-time Promotora
- \$300 ten biopsies
- \$200 ten ultrasound examinations
- \$50 ten Pap spears
- \$5 one Pap smear

Sandals in San Marcos

Nikki Ingersoll, Washburn University Delegate

As I stare down at my sole-less leather sandals bought at the market in Matagalpa, I learn our group will be hiking to Los Quinchos in San Marcos rather than taking the bus. How had I been the only one that missed the tennis shoe memo? Regardless of my footwear, or lack there of, we hiked on muddy roads through the mountains. Upon arriving at the farm, after a forty-five minute hike, several blisters on my toes were ready to pop. I grimaced as we trekked up the handmade stairs to the top of the farm hoping that there wouldn't be much more walking.

When I saw the kids, the pain on my feet ceased to exist. Every one of the kids was wearing sandals much older than mine and they smiled from ear to ear. The excitement we brought to the farm kids was seamless. They embraced us with open arms, grabbed our hands and pulled us along as they showed us their home at Los Quinchos. We played with baby bunnies, baby goats and pigs. We climbed trees and picked mini oranges – all of which the children did in their sandals. The adventure around Los Quinchos with

the kids was life changing. The happiness and contentment each one possessed was beautiful. After living on the streets these kids were living - as adventurous kids should - blessed with a bed and food to eat. The Los Quinchos organization gets children out from where they don't belong, off of the streets and into a loving environment filled with friends who become siblings over their years on the farm. At Los Quinchos the kids can finally grasp a feeling of belonging. Los Quinchos saves lives and creates greater opportunities. From the streets of the cities to the farmland of Los Quinchos, the kids give up addictions and replace hazardous habits with loving relationships and education for the future.

As we left Los Quinchos in San Marcos, a part of me stayed with these children who so eagerly embraced us. They weren't worried about wearing only sandals; they climbed the trees anyway. I learned to embrace the children in front of me rather than complain about my small discomforts. □

An Update with Gratitude from the Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman

Kitty Madden

Here in Matagalpa as we celebrate El Día de la Amistad (day of friendship aka Valentine's Day), we also celebrate the 150th anniversary of the founding of our city.

It is a time at the Casa Materna to give thanks for friends throughout the world who make possible the continuing work of serving rural mothers with high-risk pregnancies. High up on our gratitude list are all of you, our friends at ProNica. Throughout the years you have not only provided material support for our mothers, especially family planning, but you have also helped to link us with other friends in the north through visits to the Casa and your recommendations to various friends and groups.

As we give thanks for friendship, we also celebrate the blessings of our first 20 years of service, grateful for the more than 15,526 mothers who have given birth to healthy babies despite the high-risk nature of their pregnancies.

One such mother was Felipa and her very healthy twins born last December.



Since 1990, the reported maternal death-rate in Nicaragua has decreased from 190/100,000 births to 86.47/100,000 in 2010. This decrease is largely due to the work of all the Casa Maternas throughout Nicaragua.

In December, ProNica wrote about our aging ambulance that has given amazing service since 1997. It is now time to put money

towards a new one instead of repairing this old one. To date, we are close to the half-way mark (to \$45,000) and deeply appreciate any help you might be able to give. □

Mark "ambulance" in the memo line on your check to ProNica.

How Does My Garden Grow

Herb Haigh

Each time I visit Nicaragua I return spiritually nurtured and by returning each year my presence speaks for itself. It says “I am here for you and I continue to Hold you in the Light.” It has also allowed me to watch Nicaraguans follow a path of slow but steady progress toward a better life. A surge in patriotism seems palpable.

As my plane leaves the ground and my visit behind, I feel like I am just beginning to connect with the Nicaraguan people and their culture. I marvel at how difficult it is to understand a place that is just two hours, but a world away.

As one year’s visit led to the next I have had the privilege to meet and become friends with people who somehow find happiness, offer kindness and give of themselves generously, amidst the crushing burden of poverty. It is a nation of people who with grace face adversity that the people of my own country cannot begin to understand. I have seen beautiful landscapes full of texture and drama. I have felt the pleasure and pain of meeting endearing children who are denied education, and whose lives will in all probability be cut short by drugs, or lack of nutrition, sanitation or healthcare.

I have also come to accept that no matter what I can give or do for Nicaragua, it will give back to me much, much more. It will always teach me how much I am blessed, it will always show me that life is a spiritual journey and that God speaks to us all along the way. It gives me living proof that we are all bound together by the divine spirit that dwells within us and among us.

Even though I don’t speak the language, on this trip I found a common language: the language of dance. As a teenager I bonded with friends who found dance provided a sense of release. As an adult I can still hear the music and I never fail to notice how people move, and I like to think they hear it, too.

Two days ago I was sitting in Quaker House trying to find a way to escape into the streets of Managua when two of the other residents, a German mother, Katia and her daughter, Lucia Ullmann, asked me if I would like to come

with them to a community center where the daughter had once attended school. It was graduation day and she was hoping to be reunited with some of her former classmates. She had returned to Nicaragua after finishing high school in Germany and was spending her gap year volunteering at the Acahualinca Women’s Center. I know the spirit spoke through me by how I surprised I was when I heard myself abruptly accept their invitation. In case that wasn’t enough to make it clear to me that I was being divinely



led I remained undeterred when they asked if I would mind if I we would take the bus rather than a car. Nicaraguan busses are especially challenging; but with a gentle push from the divine off we went.

The spirit spared the long wait in the hot Managua sun by having the bus arrive almost

exactly as we did, (thank you spirit). Then I thought I might be dreaming when I got on board and found the bus was only half full with plenty of extra worn out uncomfortable seats.

During the war much blood had been shed at the community center, and I wondered how anyone could reconcile having a school where there the sight of so much blood had been, but when we arrived I immediately understood. A large plaque on front of the stage where the graduates were to be honored boldly proclaimed the school motto, “Choose to live free and choose to live a life of non-violence.” The weight of those words was with me when I looked around at all the parents and siblings who were all smiles, well dressed, and excited about seeing their loved ones accomplishment recognized. Graduation from any school in Nicaragua is not routine; and it is cause for great celebration. Even a simple graduation from elementary school may well be the only one possible for these young people or even a first for anyone in the family.

And then shyly they appeared on stage, maybe six to ten years old the class of 2011. See page 6

from page 5 They were gaily costumed smiling, full of nervous giggles, and ready to express their joy by dancing, whirling and embracing their way around the stage. I suddenly realized that dancing is a basic part of any Nicaraguan celebration.

Dance is something I know about and I have spent a lot of time with children at various ballet schools. I have learned there are two things to look for if you want to predict who will be a dancer and who will not. The first is that their back and their legs must be straight and secondly they will be smiling. And once the fear of the audience left them, these children beamed from ear to ear.

I had seen Nicaraguan folk dancing before but with just one or two dancers on stage. It was engaging, fluid in motion, and the stage was well balanced. I found it enjoyable but not enlightening. These children with their arms raised to their shoulders and their little heads turned proudly toward one shoulder and then the other, and moving in sequence with each other like the gears inside a large clock spelled joy. I fought back the tears I was so taken by what I was watching. I left that community center realizing that these people, especially these children, knew the horror of war was behind them and life is in front of them. Thank you, God for allowing these children to show me this. I felt as if, in a strange sort of way, they had brought my life to a new place.

When we returned to Quaker House, I was still so lifted up by the experience I had at the community center, I asked

Lillian, our Nicaragua director, if there happened to be a performance at the National Theater that evening, which would be our last in the country and I hadn't had enough. She went to the computer and returned grinning and said, yes there is, The Nicaraguan National Ballet Folkloric or the, "Nicaraguan Folk Dancing Company." God had spoken, and we were on our way.

Dance is a marriage between the dancers, composers and the choreographers. One can be more talented than the other and the performance can be successful but when they come together it is magic. The theme for the evening was a celebration of the people of Nicaragua. When the curtain went up on stage there were thirty or forty dancers whirling around in breathtakingly vivid costumes when it hit me hard. The stage was sparkling with the colors of Nicaragua. The dancers gave me the very clear image of hibiscus flowers shining in the bright light of the rainforest. These were the colors I had seen in the murals and storefronts and in the clothes people wore. These are the colors given to us by the flowers and the earth, and these were God's creatures, people who have outlived wars, starvation, and disease. These colors greeted us when we arrived and they will outlive us. They express the core the strength and the beauty of this country and of its people. It is part of the love these people have for their country and it helps sustain them.

When I return again, as I know I will, it will be with a new vision, yet again. □

ProNica History Part III - Growth in the New Millennium

Melissa Ajabshir, ProNica Executive Director

While ProNica of the 1980s was characterized by solidarity with Nicaraguans enduring extreme scarcity and war, ProNica of the 1990s was marked by a determination to stay the course when the romance of the revolution ended. With the new millennium ProNica grew into a distinctive maturity. In Nicaragua, we became an official NGO, and in the US we incorporated into a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Devastation to Nicaragua from Hurricane Mitch in 1998 brought the most media attention the impoverished Central American nation had received since the 1980s Contra



Carmen Gonzalez and UF delegates

War. North Americans responded, and ProNica garnered many new supporters. By 2000, donations had increased several times that of pre-Mitch years, and funding to project partners increased 270%. While much had been learned from the first fifteen years of assisting grassroots groups, decisions about project support were

more critical than ever. Meticulous discernments were made by the

Nicaraguan consejo and the Florida committee: Was the project community-generated or run by an individual? Would it enhance relationships in the neighborhood or cause strife and envy? Might the project undercut

developing local industries? Asking these hard questions produced many excellent projects, and ProNica partnered with top notch grassroots groups free from scandal and corruption.



Lillian Hall

The expansion required increased time and energy. During the 1990s our Nicaragua coordinators received only basic stipends, so most committed to only a few years of service. Concerned over increased demands, ProNica committee member in Florida, Peg Rigg, sought donations for a salary. A very generous supporter, Nancy Taylor, met

her request and committed to monthly contributions that turned

the coordinator stipend into a modest salary, lending permanence and stability to the position.

With that, Lillian Hall redefined the position, strengthening ProNica as a whole. Throughout the new millennium decade, she worked with over twenty five project partners from a dozen municipalities. She placed and mentored an ever-increasing number of long-term volunteers. While small Friends Witness Tours were a mainstay, Lillian developed ProNica's larger delegation program, hosting groups of up to 18 participants. In 1993 she organized the first student delegation for Eckerd College, a group that returned five times. By 2010 Lillian hired Carmen Gonzalez as a delegation leader, and ProNica hosted 8 delegations in a single year. In addition to colleges, we hosted groups as diverse as the Nunavut Inuits, Harlem StreetSquash and the Gesundheit! Institute clowns. ProNica's dual missions of supporting grassroots groups and educating North Americans about Nicaragua flourished under Lillian's tutelage.

Casa Cuáquera offered inexpensive, dormitory-style hospitality for international visitors. Various caretakers came and went over the decade, each adding a special touch, perhaps Becca Renk and Paul Mohally most of all. This young Quaker couple constructed a new room, added groovy posters and made sensible structural improvements. Groups like Green Empowerment, Juntos Adelante, Just Hope, Witness for Peace, United Students for Fair Trade and others landed at Quaker House since 2000. Dining room table conversations never ceased to be fascinating.

In the Florida office in 2006, after 16 years as clerk of ProNica, Ruth Hyde Paine wanted to be near her family in California. It was hard to imagine who could replace

her. Stateside coordinators in the 2000s had been Ken Kinzel, Doug McCown and Kathy Wingard. But Ruth brought a special continuity, with her love and dedication generally translating into full-time volunteer work. Between 1990 and 2006, she traveled to Nicaragua ten times. Affectionately and diligently, she nurtured the bonds between ProNica and its spiritual parent organization, Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Like clockwork, newsletters went out, donations were processed, bills were paid and hearts were even mended. Ruth ensured that through every transition, whether in Nicaragua or the US, ProNica's mission remained right on track.

Preparing for her absence, Ruth and the committee carefully selected those who would carry on. Long-time Quaker and ProNica supporter Pam Haigh took on the role of clerk, Peg Richards stepped in as bookkeeper, and Davida Johns was hired as the new stateside coordinator, a position that grew to full-time. Davida had been a computer programmer, a Peace Corps volunteer in Belize, sold Fair Trade and had traveled to Nicaragua on a grant to photograph ProNica projects. She was the ideal candidate,



Davida Johns and Ruth Hyde Paine

and the committee eagerly welcomed her. Davida stepped into ProNica in the midst of significant organizational growing pains. Seeking to streamline operations, she conducted board

development, upgraded software, restructured office systems, documented complex procedures, systemized grant procedures and so much more. Determined to preserve and develop ProNica's vital works, Davida delivered a professionalism that was very much needed by the evolving organization.

By 2011 ProNica contributors from across the US and beyond had supported the work of Nicaraguan grassroots innovators for a quarter of a century. Ruth, Lillian, Davida, their predecessors and the whole ProNica family of supporters remained steadfast: we sided with the powerless, eased the burdens of extreme poverty, and helped make one very special corner of the world a better place. □

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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Join the Art-Focused Friends Witness Tour Nicaragua 2012

August 15 – 25

\$950 per person plus airfare

Discover Nicaragua for yourself. Learn about the historical, political and cultural issues which shape current conditions in the country. As part of a small group tour organized by ProNica, your visit will bring you in touch with the artisans, community-based projects that we support and the people who are working everyday to improve the conditions of the poor and marginalized. Fee includes accommodations at Quaker House in Managua, meals, all in-country travel and translation. Space is limited so make plans soon. Phone 727.821.2428 for reservations or visit the ProNica website at www.ProNica.org for the latest tour information.

"It is exciting to see first-hand what ProNica partners do..."

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La Chureca girl at lunch