



PRONiCA

News from Nicaragua

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Quakers in Solidarity with Nicaraguans for 25 Years

Back Home, Delegations Transform Lives

Professor Rick Ellis, Washburn University

Leading my first international service trip to Nicaragua, I expected my students to learn about life in a developing country and to experience making a difference in the lives of others. Five years and five delegations later I realize that those most impacted are the students themselves—and the impact is more far more reaching than I could have imagined.

On ProNica delegations, students attend lectures about Nicaraguan history and politics, labor side-by-side with Nicaraguans on service projects, and even live with host families in rural areas. Through all this and much more, they learn about issues in Nicaragua and how local communities solve their own problems.

On my first trip, ProNica Program Coordinator Lillian Hall shared the history of the literacy brigades during the revolution. Truly inspired, student Lacey Keller returned to the US and worked with me to secure a grant from the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education for training college students as literacy tutors for junior high school learners. Lacey developed the program, which is still being offered today in Topeka, Kansas, at six different sites with forty literacy tutors helping students aged three to adulthood.

The impact on Lacey did not end upon graduation. Headed to Nicaragua in January 2007, Lacey was pretty clear she wanted to apply her business degree to international

finance. By the time graduation rolled around, Lacey enrolled in graduate school at New School in New York City. She earned a Masters degree in Economics and subsequently took a job with the Service Employees International Union creating better working conditions for people employed in service jobs—a far cry from international finance.



Megan Maes Drives an Ox Cart

Megan Maes came to Washburn from the small town of Chase, Kansas. Initially, her family was opposed to her traveling to

Nicaragua mainly out of a lack of knowledge of where she was headed and probably with a bit of fear. Megan returned to Kansas inspired to explore the world. Since graduation Megan has moved to Denver where she is employed at Regents University as the coordinator of internship placements in their International Non-profit Management graduate program. Megan is also pursuing a master's degree in International Non-Profit Management.

Another particularly inspiring story is that of Cheri Stortz. Cheri was involved in our community service scholarship programs as a tutor with JumpStart and as a Bonner Leader. In August of 2007, Cheri's fiancé drowned in the Kansas River while on a canoe trip. As a result of this Cheri took a leave from her service work. As time went on Cheri could not regain her motivation to return to service and wasn't sure what direction she was headed. In July of 2008, I convinced Cheri to come to Nicaragua with our delegation. During that trip Cheri experienced the

see *Home* page 2

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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.

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Home from page 1

work of Carlos Vidal with Los Quinchos, the sense of community in El Limon, and how meaningful

her interactions could be with the children of La Chureca. However, the most impactful experience for Cheri came from one of our side trips for relaxation. One afternoon the group went to La Estezuela, the waterfall outside of El Limon. For the past year Cheri had not been near a body of water due to the memories of the previous year. On that day Cheri made the conscious decision to swim in the pond, in her own words, "This brought me back and made me realize I needed to move on." Upon returning to Topeka, Cheri became reinvested in her community and began looking for work that would make a difference. She is currently the director of Compeer, a program that matches people in "buddy" positions with people with severe and persistent mental illness. Cheri attributes her reinvestment

in the community directly to her experience in Nicaragua.



Hilary and Corey

Corey Sims and Hilary Pearson so were impacted by their experiences in Nicaragua that they both chose to pursue graduate degrees at SIT Graduate

Institute in Vermont. Corey's

focus was on international development while Hilary finished with a degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages. Since their trip to Nicaragua, Hilary has taught English in Thailand and Africa while Corey has also worked in Africa after finishing his military service. Corey and Hilary got married a year ago and are now pursuing employment with international development programs.

These are but a few examples of the impact ProNica has had on our students—there are many more: Derek Koenigsdorf works full time for Gear Up, a program helping under-resourced youth to prepare for college. A.J. Faunce is the building coordinator for Habitat for Humanity in Topeka, providing housing for low-income families. Angelique Flinn returned to campus and became our Oxfam Change Leader this past year—and the list goes on. Without question these students' service work at the local level was significantly affected by their experiences in Nicaragua through our partnership with ProNica. □

FMI: <http://www.pronica.org/delegations/>

Acahualinca Women's Center Director, Maria Elena Bonilla, Visits the US

Kathy Hersh, ProNica Board Member

For the first time in its 25-year history, ProNica brought one of its partners to the Southeastern Yearly Meeting Quaker Gathering. Maria Elena Bonilla, director of the Acahualinca Women's Clinic in Managua, stood in front of the plenary session to tell her story.

The Acahualinca clinic, a long-time partner of ProNica's, dispenses free pap smears and health services. After Maria Elena had been working at the clinic, she had a pap test which diagnosed cancer. Early discovery saved her life. She is devoted to helping women overcome the effects of poverty, ignorance and abuse and works tirelessly, sometimes with deferred pay, so the clinic doors can stay open.

"I am a cancer survivor and also a survivor of domestic violence," she told the gathering. She freed herself from the abusive relationship, went back to school and eventually got a law degree.

Maria Elena's strong voice and rousing speech moved many to tears. Everyone has been aware for many years of

the important work that ProNica supports in Nicaragua. Maria Elena first experienced silence and Quaker process in the ProNica board meeting held the weekend prior to the Gathering. Her presence and her powerful testimony had a similar effect on members of Sarasota Monthly Meeting, who hosted the ProNica board meeting. She loved our reference to the Light and expressed her admiration for the way we conduct business.

Shortly after her return to Nicaragua, Maria Elena found out that the Spanish agency which is the primary supporter of the clinic is pulling out of Central America. The shock was tremendous and the future of the clinic is shaky. ProNica is determined to help Maria Elena keep the clinic open. A Mother's Day fundraising campaign had already been launched. In the months ahead, we will be doubling our efforts to raise funds for this life-saving sanctuary for women. □



Maria Elena and Lillian

Alarm for Acahualinca

Melissa Ajabshir

The Spanish aid organization (AECID) that funds almost all salaries at the Acahualinca Women's Center is closing its Central American operations. Eight salaries are being slashed. The psychologist's salary has already run out. The core group of 40 women she was attending regularly (as well as walk-ins) no longer receive help.

In October, the other seven salaries will run out: project coordinator, legal-aid attorney, doctor, administrator, nurse, educator and bookkeeper. The Women's Center has weathered some hard storms in the past, and they're not giving up. In fact, they're already applying to other large funding organizations, but this is a huge blow.

The most immediate need, while they apply to other agencies, is to bridge the gap for the psychologist's salary. Please consider sponsoring her \$500 monthly salary for one or more months.

Grant cycles take time, and international aid organizations are strapped for cash. It is \$575 to sponsor a month of the legal-aid attorney's salary. The doctor earns \$650. These two positions are essential to the Women's Center. Without salaries, they will have no choice but to seek work elsewhere, and the Women's Center won't have the means to replace them. □

Acahualinca Psychologist's Impact

Paula Samuelson



After years of living with a violent husband, Josefa felt she wanted to die. Through her therapy with psychologist, Aminta Mejía, at the Acahualinca Women's Center, she learned to practice visualization, which she says allowed her to imagine a life free from the beatings and insults she'd endured for so long. She'll

be forever grateful for the help she received from Dania Cherez, the Center's lawyer, as she pursued her "critical path." Josefa now assists the staff with workshops and support groups because she is dedicated to helping other women in her community value themselves and say "no" to violence. □

*To sponsor a month of Aminta's salary (\$500),
earmark your contribution:
Acahualinca psychologist salary*

Ottawa, Canada's Bridge of Friendship with Las Yahoskas

Mariamanda (Amanda) Espinoza

In 1991 when Italian Zelinda Roccia visited Nicaragua, she was deeply affected by the vast number of boys and girls on the streets: children without clothing or shoes, not attending school, sniffing glue or cleaning the windshields of cars at the traffic lights. These boys and girls were selling no less than their very consciences on the streets.

Seeing the desperate plight of these children, Zelinda, along with Nicaraguan Carlos Vidal Paladino, created Los Quinchos, the first non-governmental organization to serve and protect the street children of Nicaragua. Some years later, in 1998, they formed Las Yahoskas.

Las Yahoskas is a home that offers protection and opportunities for battered and abandoned girls suffering from domestic abuse and exploitation. It houses up to 35 girls between the ages of five and sixteen. Many of them were at risk for prostitution and drugs. In their new home, both younger girls and adolescents receive much needed love, shelter, clothing, nutritious meals, and access to public education & health care. The girls participate in sports, traditional and modern dance, sewing classes and computing skills. An interdisciplinary staff that includes teachers, social workers, psychologists, administrators and volunteers, provides comprehensive and loving care.



Las Yahoskas Home for Girls

Inspired by the program's motto, "Never Again a Child on the Streets," a group of friends in Ottawa, Canada formed The Yahoskas-Ottawa-Committee to support Las Yahoskas in San Marcos, Nicaragua. The committee's mission is both to bring awareness of Las Yahoskas to Canadians and to raise much needed funds for the work led by Zelinda Roccia and Carlos Vidal Paladino at Las Yahoskas. Las Yahoskas struggles to raise enough money to fulfill

their yearly budget (food, utilities, clothing, supplies, equipment, care givers wages, extra curricular activities, etc). With the help of our Canadian fellows, we support The Yahoskas' girls in becoming strong women of Nicaragua and future Global Citizens.

Girls deserve to be seen, heard, supported and valued. These are everyone's birthrights.

In 2005, Amanda Espinoza, a Nicaraguan by birth, had the privilege of witnessing the life-changing impacts of The Yahoskas, not only for the girls at the centre but also for the people who meet them. In 2011 Amanda and her cousin, Martha Chaves, organized "A Night of Comedy for Nicaragua", featuring Martha Chaves herself (a professional comedian and playwright). The night was so much fun and successful that they decided to make it an annual event.

The Yahoskas-Ottawa-Committee was rounded out by Maureen Monette, Anna Peletta, Maricarmen Guevara and Normand Pellerin. Together the group organized this year's successful "Comedy and Magic Fundraiser" which took place in Ottawa at The Prescott Tavern on April 15th. Besides Martha Chaves, the event featured Canadian comedians Jennifer Hayward, Alex Wood and as a special guest, Diego Lopez, a professional magician and hypnotist, also from Nicaragua. The night of April 15th was definitely a night of fun, magic, laughter, and solidarity with The Yahoskas, and the needed amount of Canadian \$3,267.50 was raised!

The Yahoskas-Ottawa-Committee recently invited the Ottawa community to be part of the collective effort to raise funds for The Yahoskas by donating their unwanted items for The Yahoskas May Garage Sale. An Annual Dinner and Silent Auction will follow sometime before 2012 ends. □

If you live in the Ottawa, Canada area and would like to get involved, please write to: The.Yahoskas.Ottawa.Committee@gmail.com or call Amanda Espinoza at 613-978-4163. If you live elsewhere and would like to help Las Yahoskas, please send your contributions to ProNica, earmarked for Las Yahoskas.

Trinity University Students' Inspiring Plan

Professor Meredith McGuire, Trinity University

Trinity University students left their morning session at the Edelma Martinez Women's Center in Rio Blanco, brimming with feelings about the serious problems that the women's organization was so courageously addressing. In less than 15 minutes they had hatched a plan for a fundraiser back on campus. It was our fifth day in Nicaragua during Spring Break, 2010.

Their ambitious plan required a little additional help, because classes are not allowed to run fundraisers; only university-chartered student organizations are permitted to collect donations. Fortunately, when the group told their classmates about all they had learned, the 12 students who had visited Nicaragua got the willing

collaboration of Trinity's chapter of Amnesty International. The national organization had a big push for women's human rights issues, especially maternal mortality and domestic violence. These were precisely the kinds of problems our group had learned of in Rio Blanco and Managua.

About 10 days before Mothers' Day, volunteers from both groups collected donations outside the Student Center



Trinity University Fundraiser

beside a display about women's human rights issues in Nicaragua. They offered a selection of three Mothers' Day cards, each with a beautiful photo taken near Rio Blanco at Cooperativa Martin Centeno. The back of the card said that a donation had been made in the recipient's honor for the support of programs for Nicaraguan women's health, security, legal rights, and education. Their three-day fundraiser, together with some persuasive appeals to family and friends brought in over \$2000 - enough money to aid more than one project.

So in late May of 2012, a second group of 15 Trinity students and two professors will be visiting the same Women's Center in Rio Blanco, where we will see some of the fruits of the first Trinity fundraiser, a new computer with accessories that will allow the women to document violence with digital photographs and digital recordings, in addition to being able to prepare and archive documents.

Fortunately, this group of students has already held its fundraiser (since our trip is after graduation), with the help of several of the same Amnesty International members and some members of the 2010 Nicaragua trip. The 15 women on this trip are looking forward to visiting several women's organizations where they will be inspired by what grass-roots initiatives created by plucky, caring women can accomplish. □

ProNica Loses Dear Friend, James R. Carlson

Ruth Hyde Paine, ProNica Emerita

Jim Carlson was an early mentor and supporter for the fledgling ProNica Committee.

He had traveled to Managua in the 1980's when the Contra war raged. That trip connected his spirit to Nicaragua, and to its people. His words, which still are on our masthead, continually remind us of the collaborative and educational nature of our work. He knew that working WITH Nicaraguans, and sensitivity to local needs and values, was crucial.

From the masthead:

"ProNica assists 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."

Jim was active with ProNica's container shipments during the U.S. Embargo on goods to Nicaragua. The



Jim Carlson circa 1988

container shipments continued until after the Embargo was lifted. Jim was there to help load the container each time we packed one.

Jim was an artist, and had special interest in plays and performance. He knew that food and shelter, while vital, were not enough. The human spirit needs much more. He reminded us of the value of art, music, books, plays. He was delighted with the local initiative and success of the Achuapa Music Festival.

Jim was fundamental to the formation, spirit and direction of ProNica.

Thank you, Jim. □

Benjamin Linder Remembered on 25th Anniversary of His Death

Richard Robohm

It was 25 years ago on 28 April 2012 that Benjamin Linder, a 27-year-old mechanical engineer from Portland, Oregon, was killed near San José de Bocay, together with two fellow workers, Pablo Rosales and Sergio Hernández. Their work party was ambushed at the site of a new hydroelectric project by Contra soldiers who shot Linder in the head as he lay wounded and helpless.

Dozens of friends, neighbors, and co-workers—and hundred of Nicaraguans whose lights shine today because of them—remembered and honored the lives and sacrifice of Benjamin, Pablo, and Sergio.

Beginning Thursday morning, April 26, with a presentation at Casa Ben Linder in Managua, the four-day schedule included activities in El Cuá, Bocay, and concluded with a graveside act of commemoration in Matagalpa.

Joan Kruckewitt, author of *The Death of Ben Linder* (1999, Seven Stories Press, NY), was a journalist in Managua in the 1980s. She described at the presentation how she got to know Ben. “I had met and talked with Ben before, and he struck me as a very serious person. Then one day he shows up at my door on a unicycle, and I really didn’t know what to make of it.” She and many of the 30 people in attendance gave personal recollections of Ben’s humor, warmth,

unicyclist, juggler, and clown, who loved pulling squeals out of children.

Thursday evening at Casa Ben Linder saw the dedication of a striking new mural inspired by Linder’s life and work, followed by a buffet dinner for 50 or more. Diana Brooks, a budding performing artist when she met Ben and invited him to live with her family in Managua in 1984, delighted the crowd with a deftly staged puppet show.



Ben Linder (1959-1987)

More than 30 people of all ages packed into a small bus on Friday to travel to El Cuá, site of Ben’s first big achievement. Thanks to

heroic efforts by the team he recruited, a 100-kilowatt hydroelectric project that had languished half-completed since 1981 was finally up and running in 1985.

Arriving in El Cuá after a lunch stop at Casa Materna in Matagalpa, the pilgrims got a report on the work and capabilities of the machine shop of the Asociación de Trabajadores de Desarrollo Rural – Benjamin Linder (ATDER-BL, the Association of Rural Development Workers – Benjamin Linder). The shop boasts a precision, if vintage, milling machine and lathe, drill press, and hydraulic press, which are used to repair old parts and fashion new ones for an expanding network of plants and projects.

On Saturday’s leg to Bocay, most of the group first took a side trip to El Bote, where a modern 930-kW hydroelectric plant provides power to 12,000 people along 65 kilometers (40 miles) of transmission lines. Those who went straight to Bocay saw young Eli Breidford, the son of Seattle machinist Wayne Breidford who worked with Ben in Nicaragua, launch the



Graveside Commemoration

humility, and commitment to social transformation. No mere technical expert, Linder also was an accomplished

Benjamin Linder: ¡Presente! ¡Presente! ¡Presente!

first pitch to initiate the Benjamin Linder baseball league. Both the plant at El Bote and the El Cuá machine shop are part of the legacy of Ben Linder and of the life's work of Rebecca Leaf, the director of ATDER-BL (<http://www.atder-bl.org/index.html>). Rebecca worked with Ben on the El Cuá and Bocay projects, then came to Bocay after his death to help continue what he started. ATDER-BL now manages projects for drinking water, small hydroelectric plants, watershed conservation, irrigation, and technology transfer.

On Saturday afternoon, schoolchildren, musicians, ATDER-BL workers, and community leaders honored Benjamin and his fallen compañeros in an 80-minute program of song, dance, readings, and speeches. One of the most affecting tributes was an acrostic poem written by tenth-grader Salomón López whose eight lines spelled “Benjamin”. “*Miles de generaciones pasarán,*” recited one young girl in clown makeup, “*y tu obra siempre amarán.*” (Thousands of generations will come and go, and they will always admire your handiwork.)

After the program, travelers joined local residents and a number of ATDER-BL workers on a stiff hike upstream and about 2 kilometers northwest of town to the site where Ben, Pablo, and Sergio were killed. Boys splashed in the swimming hole behind a dam that now spans the stream and feeds the turbines of Bocay’s power plant. A short walk upstream of the dam, friends of Benjamin stole a few minutes for private meditation at the now-peaceful streambank where he died.

An outdoor program in Bocay later that evening featured a showing of the documentary “American Sandinista” and a puppet show by Diana Brooks. On Sunday the busload from Bocay met carloads from Managua at the Matagalpa cemetery. Those who knew Ben and stood with him in the 80s, now twenty-five years later stood beside his grave.

The commemoration began with the reading, in English and Spanish, of a kaddish (ancient Jewish prayer sequence). In poetry, personal statements, and music, people then tried to express what Ben meant to them, to Nicaragua, and to the world. The first portion of the kaddish reading, a poem written by Hannah Szenes, may have captured their feelings:

*There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth
though they have long been extinct.
There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world
though they are no longer among the living.
These lights are particularly bright when the night is dark,
They light the way for humankind.*

Expectant Mothers Bond at Casa Materna

Kitty Madden

Breathing in and out, we give thanks for this present moment intimately shared with the mothers and staff of the Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman in the green hills of Matagalpa in northern Nicaragua.

Our daily walk up in the hills combined with prenatal exercises is a time of special grace and spiritual union with the mothers and their babies within. Today as frequently happens, many walk hand in hand with women they had only come to know yesterday. Today the youngest mother is sixteen-year-old Rosa Ivania and the eldest is Dona Veronica now 42 years old and expecting her 11th child.

As we circle in the shade of overarching trees, we pray for the women of the world who will give birth today. Some will give birth amidst war or domestic violence. Some will be well attended. Others will be alone. We ask that all survive, and yet we also know that around the world there is a maternal death every minute. Maternal death is often called the silent epidemic.



Meditative Walk for Mothers-to-be

As we form our circle, we share our names, ages, the number of children each has and where we are from. It helps us connect with the partners and children who await the women and their newborns in their home communities. Today during our sharing we were serenaded by a variety of birds.

We once again focus on our breathing as each mother has an inner dialogue with her child within. She tells her/him of the blessings she hopes will come to this tender new life. Here in Nicaragua, newborns are called “*los tiernos*” –the tender ones. Today, as often during this period of meditation, the breezes begin to blow all around us, a sign, I think, of the presence of the Mother, of the Divine, however s/he is named.

Our circle is opened and we take time to enjoy the beauty of nature - hibiscus, orchids, birds of paradise, spider plants, zebra plants - all around us as we begin our walk down the hill back to the place that is called “*casa*” – home for as long as each mother will need it. □

Casa
Cuáquera



José and Panchita welcome you

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Discover Nicaragua for yourself. Learn about the cultural, historical and political 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