



# PRONiCA

## News from Nicaragua

September 2014  
Vol 27 No 3

Published quarterly by the ProNica Committee of the Southeastern Yearly Meeting since 1987  
*Quakers in Solidarity with Nicaraguans for 27 Years*

### Special Letter of Thanks to ProNica from Women Farmers of Rio Blanco

By The Women's Agricultural Production Cooperative of Rio Blanco

Through this letter, the Women's Agricultural Production Cooperative wants to acknowledge each one of the friends of ProNica, and thank you for your support of the female farmers in the municipality of Rio Blanco.

We firmly believe that family development should integrate social, economic, and environmental factors. And thanks to your generous support of our programs, we have been able to carry out our holistic projects for families and even expand upon them. We would like to share some of our accomplishments during the first half of 2014.

We continue in our staunch efforts to accompany victims of domestic violence through the legal system and train women so they can prevent and overcome acts of violence to which they have been subjected.

Our cooperative has also contributed to the prevention of deforestation by initiating 34 productive plantations, forests, and protected water sources. From these efforts, women also gain shelter, sources

of food, and income generation. In total, this has amounted to sowing more than 85,000 plants among members who possess farms exceeding 42 hectares (104 acres) of natural reserve.

Additionally, we have supported members who don't have farms, helping with their home gardens in ways

that complement the diets of their families. Also, selling the surplus contributes to the families' income. For these smaller gardens, more than 3,000 plants were contributed, between ornamental, fruit, and vegetable plants.

We want to mention that without your support, it wouldn't have been possible to serve so many women, single mothers, and families. We hope to continue counting on your

help in order to, bit by bit, diminish and eradicate violence and empower every one of the women in our municipality.

With much love, thank you...

Best regards: *Cooperativa Agropecuaria de Producción Mujeres Productoras de Río Blanco R.L* □



Melissa and Laura of ProNica plant a young cacao tree together with women farmers from Rio Blanco

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Women's Agricultural Coop of Rio Blanco

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

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

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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## Estelí Library's Extensive Reach

By Félix Flores, Director of the Library of Estelí



Librarian and Director, Félix Flores in front of The Estelí Library Mural

The work of a librarian in Estelí involves instilling a sense of culture and a love of reading through enthusiastic encouragement of the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the city. It may seem intangible, but in truth, the fruits are visible in the fabric of the community itself. The beautiful city of Estelí has seen remarkable socio-economic development in recent years, and we are confident that the library has contributed by cultivating curious minds and boosting literacy rates.

This year, the library has been busy developing plans and programs, working

hand-in-hand with the community at large as well as with neighborhoods and institutions to ensure free access to the library and its services for all, especially children. The library has some 2,500 monthly users and visitors, and we are always grateful to count on the generous support of ProNica.

We host activities like story time, craft workshops, drawing and painting workshops, children's games, educational movies, biographical expositions, meetings among writers from Estelí and all over the country, adult literacy classes, computer courses, and many more events that take place around the calendar. There are young women volunteers who give guided tours to school-aged children and preschoolers from the neighborhood, as well as to parents of families who come to read to their children, including some who read to their infants.

Also, this year we are helping to support the Casa Materna of Estelí with a new project called "biblio-bebe." It consists of visiting the center once a week to lead recreational activities and read children's stories and nursery rhymes with expectant mothers from rural communities.

Additionally, the library provides invaluable support for formal and informal learning, working daily to address the varying requests for information from students of different levels.

Finally, in July the mayor of Estelí, in the cultural center where the library facilities are located, launched a free wi-fi service, enabling 50 people at a time to access the internet, bringing even the poorest among us closer to the newest technologies. □



## Free Beauty School in Acahualinca Neighborhood is a Cut Above

By Laura Hopps, Program Director

The Acahualinca Beauty School continues to flourish, offering a free, year-long program to area locals. The school is funded solely by the generosity of ProNica donors and its honorary mentor, Pam Haigh, who hosts fundraisers year-round and visits the school for the annual graduation ceremony every December.

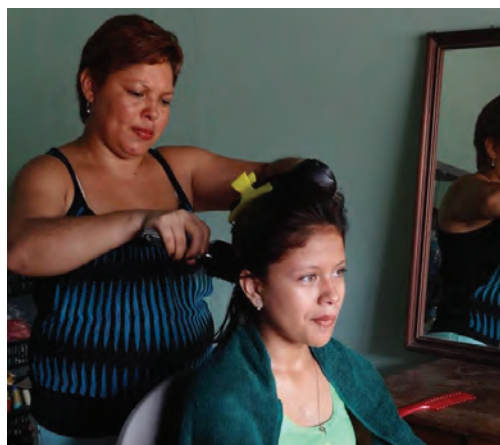
There are currently 24 women enrolled. Some of these women are the children of sex workers or are escaping domestic violence. All of them come from one of Managua's poorest neighborhoods where they face greater than 60% unemployment and underemployment.

Often, the biggest obstacles for a woman leaving an abusive relationship is the lack of economic

resources to support herself and her children. The clinic addresses these needs by providing counseling, group therapy, educational programs, and health exams. Their children are also eligible to attend the Acahualt Preschool and take advantage of a whole range of holistic services offered by the Center.

For many graduates, their new skills are transformative. A recent Beauty School graduate commented, "With a pair of scissors and a spray bottle, I can start a small business out of my house, working for myself to support my family."

Thank you to all of our generous supporters for continuing to keep the Acahualinca Beauty School open and for supporting women's economic empowerment. □



A beauty school student practices styling the hair of another student

## Casa del Niño Sows Seeds of Change

By Laura Hopps, Program Director

The members of Mujeres del Plomo Artisan Collective have their own store today where they sell jewelry made of seeds gathered from the surrounding forest. But they couldn't have done it without a micro-loan several years ago from ProNica partner, Casa del Niño.

The relationship between Casa del Niño and the women from the remote village of El Plomo began years back with the arrival of the Casa del Niño Mobile Clinic for cervical cancer screenings, which was backed by a grant from ProNica through our supporters.

After receiving services from the Mobile Clinic, the women were trained as community health educators, spreading the word about sexual health throughout the region. Their leadership in the community grew, and when they had the idea of making seed jewelry, they applied for a micro-loan from Casa del Niño. Mujeres del Plomo is proud to have paid their loan back in full, knowing that the money goes into a revolving fund to help other local people empower themselves.

Today, the women of El Plomo are generating income to support their families, they continue to serve as health educators, and their children benefit from the after-school music and art classes provided by the Casa del Niño. □



Mujeres del Plomo Artisan Collective member and her daughter with a display of seed earrings she helped create to generate family income

### How Your Contribution of \$5.00 Can Make a Difference

- 1 Pap Smear at the Acahualinca Women's Center
- 1 mother's post operative medications from the Casa Materna
- 12 trees for the Women's Agricultural Cooperative of Rio Blanco
- 2 days of care for a child rescued by the Quinchos' Filter House

## Are You in the New York Metro Area, and Would You Like to Help Form a Giving Circle in Support of the Acahualinca Women's Center?

By Diane Keefe, Friend of ProNica



We're seeking out residents of the New York Metro Area

Eager to learn more about the concerns of Friends in Nicaragua, my husband and I visited the Acahualinca Women's Center while on a delegation in 2010.

The Women's Center was the centerpiece of our afternoon tour. While there I saw pregnant women and other women with children at their feet waiting for their check-ups. I

observed the legal office where women with domestic violence complaints or divorce cases are given legal assistance, and I even visited the "Salon de Belleza," beautician job training facilities as we walked through the two story facility.

We met with the founders who had been there for over two decades. They explained to us that as funding ebbed and flowed, their staff simply divided limited resources for salaries among themselves rather than laying off people during the bad times.

They spoke of a major funder from Spain who had supported them for years. When I read in the last ProNica Newsletter that the funder could no longer support them, I wanted to help, remembering their staff said they passed out condoms and educated sex workers about STD's, essential public health work. If there are others in the NY metro area who want to work with me in raising awareness and funding for this important work, please contact me:

Diane Keefe 917-312 4601 □

## Would You Like to Form a ProNica Giving Circle in Your Area?

By Melissa Ajabshir, ProNica Executive Director

We are consistently inspired by you—our ProNica family of supporters—and the many ways you contribute your time, talent and resources toward a better world. We're delighted that the work of ProNica partner organizations in Nicaragua speaks to your hearts and minds.

As we regularly see our partners taking practical and innovative steps to create just conditions in their communities, a heartfelt phone call from a ProNica supporter means so much—like the one we recently received from Diane Keefe (see article above). It emboldens our resolve to accompany our partners with everything we have.

When Diane shared that she wanted to start a Giving Circle in the New York Metro Area for the Acahualinca Women's Center, we jumped for joy. Then we wondered about other friends of ProNica who might want to join in such a

meaningful form of shared giving but might not be aware of giving circles or know quite where to begin.

If you are so led, whether your ProNica Giving Circle starts with one neighbor on your back porch over coffee or with eight friends invited to dinner—if you form face-to-face community around a common purpose of investing in a more peaceful and equitable world, we'd love to hear about it and offer any support we can. We'll be happy to answer your questions about our partners and share information we have about giving circles.



A first step may be to decide which ProNica partner you're led to form a Circle around? This newsletter is an excellent place to start, and for additional details about our partners, you may visit the "Projects" link on our website: [www.pronica.org](http://www.pronica.org). We greatly look forward to hearing from you! □

If you are in the NY metro area and would like to work to raise awareness and funding for the Acahualinca Women's Center, please contact Diane about the NY Giving Circle at 917-312-4601. For more information about starting a ProNica Giving Circle in your own area, contact the ProNica Stateside office at 727-821-2428.



# Gratitude for Being Part of ProNica's Commitment to Peace and Friendship in Nicaragua

By Laura Hopps, Outgoing Program Director, Nicaragua

I have had the honor to serve for the last two years as ProNica's Program Director in Nicaragua. In November I am departing to pursue a leading to study acupuncture and traditional herbal medicine, to be closer to family, and to effect social change in my home country now that I've learned so much over the past 7 years about community organizing from Nicaraguan friends and colleagues.

I am immensely grateful to ProNica supporters and volunteers, to our staff team in Nicaragua and the U.S., our dedicated Board of Directors, delegation participants, friends, and to my invaluable advisors on the *Consejo* (advisory board) in Nicaragua. Thank you for the commitment that you all bring to our mission of upholding this special Friends concern in Nicaragua for nearly 30 years.

When I first came to Nicaragua in 2007, I was inspired by the spirit of the revolution that was so distinct from

that grant access to higher education and healthcare to the poor majorities.

This spirit of change is evident in the stories of ProNica partners like Zelinda Rocco, founder of **Los Quinchos**, who came to Nicaragua during the 80s in solidarity with the radical change taking place, and was dismayed to see children on the street, orphans of the contra war. When she returned after the war in the 90s, the trickle of street children had become a flood, as soldiers coming home from war were without employment, and the economy was in shambles. Families saw no other options than to send their kids out into the streets. Zelinda dropped her life in Italy to befriend street children in the Oriental market of Managua, risking her safety. Without any big foundation grants backing her, she initially built Los Quinchos out of love for the abandoned children she encountered, with generous support arriving later.



Laura attends the high school graduation of a Los Quinchos participant



Laura meets with staff of the Acahualinca Women's Center

other countries like El Salvador where I had lived before, where the grind of generations of oppression was so evident. In Nicaragua, a spirit of hope continues; a lived experience of working to build another society based on care for people, equity and justice. While the contra war prevented the dream of the revolution from being fully actualized, an understanding persists that people, joined together for a common purpose, with vision, perseverance, and a willingness to give, can do incredible things. They can eliminate polio through door-to-door vaccination campaigns carried about by grassroots volunteer health-workers, radically diminish illiteracy rates from over 50% to 12% in 6 months, and create free schools and hospitals

**The Acahualinca Women's Center** was likewise born out of a need of the community, and out of the courage of a few brave women, Maria Elena, Silvia, Norma, Raquel, and others, who said "no more deaths of women in our community!" and were not content with community leaders' solutions to build a new graveyard to address the deaths. They discovered cervical and uterine cancer as the source of these deaths and soon dedicated their lives to testing for cervical cancer (most often the result of HPV infection—the biggest sexually transmitted disease killer in the U.S. after HIV/AIDS). They later expanded into supporting victims of domestic violence, the LGBT community, people living with HIV, sex workers, and others who needed their caring support.

**The Acahualinca Beauty School** has been a core program of the Women's Center, providing job training for women in one of Managua's poorest barrios, where salvage working has long been the predominant occupation. They have thrown more than 20 years of

*Outgoing Director continues page 6*

From page 5, *Outgoing Director*

funding deficits that would have had most other nonprofits closing their doors years ago. The team continues to operate mainly with the funding of ProNica's staunch supporters.

**Casa del Niño** in San Ramon is another organization that started the moment its founders, out of compassion, saw needs in their community and began responding with whatever resources were available to them. The center began as a collective of mothers gathering to feed hungry children in war-starved rural Matagalpa. They promoted soy as a cheap protein to address malnourishment. Soon they expanded their efforts into sharing natural medicine techniques, as no conventional medicines were available, and yet there were effective herbal medicines freely available in the surrounding forests. Over the years, an impressive number of programs have been added, from micro-lending to an after school arts program, rural tour guide training for youth, and the mobile clinic for women—always stemming from the needs of the population, rather than the assessment of outside organizations.

**Casa Materna**, likewise, was born out of a response to great need in a time when the revolution had ended, along with the health programs it had provided, leaving rural mothers at higher risk in their pregnancies. Today, Casa Materna is a model for grassroots health promotion and maternal care and has served over 16,800 mothers in its 24 years. At one point in danger of losing the Casa to hostile detractors, the staff and the rural mothers staged a sit-in to be able to maintain the maternity house's essential services to rural women. Today, the government is using the Casa Materna as a preeminent model for new Casas near rural hospitals. As such, the Casa Materna Matagalpa now receives increasingly high-risk cases, as most of the medium-risk pregnant moms are being cared for at the government's Casa Maternas.

**The Martin Centeno Community** also represents the spirit of resistance and the lived experience of organizing for change. Displaced by the contra war, and having lost

their lives into this ongoing struggle, despite continued

loved ones, the original 16 families were relocated to Rio Blanco during the revolution, on land that had once been a Somoza family cow pasture. The community remains highly organized today through a Community Council that is responsible for the water sanitation system, Pastoral Care for community members, outreach to surrounding communities, an active Youth Committee, and various other working groups to keep the 250-member community healthy and safe.

Community leader Adilia Vega Vega spearheaded an effort to set up the **Rural Domestic Violence Network of Rio Blanco** in the wake of a local woman's murder at the hands of the woman's estranged husband after having filed a police report on his violence that received no response. The 30+ advocates also received **Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)** training this past year, facilitated by Martin Centeno Community leaders who had received the three-workshop series from ProNica last year.

**The Women's Agricultural Cooperative of Rio Blanco** which houses the domestic violence program, is also leading the way in climate change adaptation this year, having received a large international grant to plant organic cacao (with additional support from ProNica) to benefit women farmers in a world where women still own less than 1% of all land.



Stateside and Nicaragua directors, Melissa and Laura, visit a small farm in Rio Blanco and learn how the new agronomist, whose salary ProNica sponsored, has trained this single mother farmer in techniques that are increasing her crop yield.

I could go on to share many more stories about our incredible partners. They have inspired me and many others to let our consciences be our compasses and to never forget that that the road is often made by walking. To “make the road by walking” sometimes evokes a well-worn foot path in an open field, but I’ve witnessed in our partners’ ongoing struggles and learned from their recollections of history, that it is no light undertaking to make an overgrown wilderness road by walking when one does not have the benefit of a construction crew.

Adilia Vega Vega recently gave a sermon at the church in Martin Centeno, where she serves as a Delegate of the Word. The passage she read was the biblical story of the Loaves and Fishes. “What is important,” she noted, “is



that a young boy came up to Jesus, and offered him what he had. It wasn't enough to feed the 5,000 men present, let alone the uncounted women and children there." "The miracle," she emphasized, "was in giving what we have to contribute towards change--and we all have something to give to our neighbors who are struggling."

I am grateful to have been part of a team of such dedicated people in Nicaragua, the U.S. and beyond. Your friendship, encouragement, integrity, wise discernment, and compassionate action on behalf of our partners has meant so much.



Welcome incoming Co-Program Director, Ada López

I could not be more elated that I will be succeeded by Ada López and Ramón Sepulveda, a wonderful couple who will be taking on the roles of Co-Program Directors in the fall. They are people of deep solidarity and love, committed to building community, to spiritual integrity, and promoting peace in their work, whether through the Nagarote Sister City

project Ramon served as Director of in the past, or the Generando Vida Community Center Ada has been a part of for many years, where she aided survivors of domestic violence.

It is an immense joy to have them on the ProNica team, and while I am laying down my role as Program Director, I remain a loyal friend of ProNica who will continue to lend support to our community partners. To quote the revolutionary song written by Chilean artist Julio Numhauser and made famous by Mercedes Sosa: "Everything changes—but my love will never change, no matter how far away I may be!"

I feel deep gratitude for all of the many friends and supporters who are part of ProNica's efforts to resist war and promote peace, planting seeds of solidarity. This bond has not only saved many lives and transformed many more, but has also given hope to the power of friendship that encourages peace to grow.

Laura Hopps

Laura@pronica.org



Welcome incoming Co-Program Director, Ramón Sepulveda

## ☐ Yes, I support solutions at the grassroots level!

Donation amount: ☐\$25 ☐\$50 ☐\$75 ☐\$100

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### Mail check or money order to:

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130 19th Ave SE  
St. Petersburg, FL 33705

### Make secure online credit card donations:

<https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/pronica>

I would like to designate my gift:

- ☐ Women's Health
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Thank you! Monthly gifts provide a predictable source of income to ProNica. To set up secure online recurring donations, please visit:

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Casa  
Cuáquera



ProNica staff and volunteers at Quaker House welcome you to visit!

### Quaker House

Casa Cuáquera is ProNica's guest house and home in Nicaragua.

Located in a quiet residential neighborhood, it is convenient to shopping, banks and restaurants. The Casa offers simple lodging in Managua for individuals and groups. Fully equipped kitchen or catering available.

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## Three Generations of Chatters Family Women Celebrate Love and Life During a Special Delegation to Nicaragua



The Chatters welcome the newest arrival to Casa Materna

In honor of her 80th birthday, Luella Chatters returned to Nicaragua for the third time with her daughter Diana and three granddaughters, Meredith, Emily, and Carmen, for a special 10-day delegation connecting with ProNica partner communities, including the Casa Materna, Matagalpa.

Luella has been friends with Kitty Madden of Casa Materna for over 35 years, first connecting with Kitty through a local peace group they both belonged to in Michigan. We are grateful to Luella and her family for their solidarity and for donations of funds and baby clothes to the Casa Materna. □

### LEGACY GIVING

A legacy gift offers you a lasting and meaningful bond with ProNica. Through your humanitarianism, Nicaraguan social innovators effectively combat the challenges of extreme poverty in their local communities. With a few simple arrangements, your life will impact this bold form of peacebuilding well into the future. Bequests, endowments and other forms of planned giving are also wise benevolent investments. **Contact us today: [stateside@pronica.org](mailto:stateside@pronica.org)**