



PRONiCA

Annual Report 2015

December 2015

Vol 28 No 4

Working in Solidarity with Nicaraguan Grassroots Organizations for 28 Years

Letter from our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Can you imagine a world where the beneficiaries of aid and the stakeholders of aid organizations held the very same dreams—and as the issues of the day shifted within communities—the objectives of the stakeholders shifted seamlessly in kind?

Well, you may not have to stretch your imagination all that much, because each year that you stand with ProNica, you say, "Yes!" to this type of ethos in international community development. You endorse a form of solidarity where the poor are understood to be crucial collaborators in overcoming their condition, whether in defining solutions to daily struggles or in challenging the underlying causes of poverty and injustice.

We're so grateful that you opted to support Casa del Niño's microloan program one year and their mobile Pap smear clinic the next—and that you funded the librarian's salary at Los Quinchos one year and backed meals at their "El Filtro" outreach center the next. In fact, as all of the project partners in Nicaragua identified challenges, carried out solutions, and collectively analyzed resources, practices and outcomes—their priorities shifted—and your partnership shifted in kind!

We can't thank you enough for your role in this bold, dignified, and highly effective form of community development! I hope you know that your bridge of friendship made a huge difference in 2015. Personally, I like to visualize it as all of you crafting a lens that refracts the light of human potential, allowing the grassroots leaders in Nicaragua to form ever more elegant images of hope, peace and justice.

I feel especially grateful for your commitment during a time when the community partners may need it more than ever. During 2015 greater uncertainty arose around political structures that once represented unadulterated hope for so



Melissa (far right) in Matagalpa meeting with the leadership team of Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman

many Nicaraguans. That, along with fears of environmental degradation and violent clashes related to the proposed canal, have wracked the psyche of a country still healing from a not-so-distant war. Scarcity of the staple red beans has spurred inflation and cost-of-living increases. Consequently, program expenditures have increased across the board for the project partners. Even amidst this daunting pressure though, ProNica partners somehow find hope and the will to keep going.

As devoted supporters, you may be asking what more you can do. A fairly straightforward and particularly invaluable way to help is by raising awareness and advocating. Consider what ProNica's work personally means to you and how it is sparking change in Nicaragua and in the world—and simply share from that place in your heart.

Together, we can do this. We can preserve a righteous ethos of community development while sustaining the work on the ground for women's health, literacy, environmental stewardship, community organizing, domestic violence accompaniment, cross-cultural education, sustainable agriculture, maternal healthcare, climate resilience, nonviolence training and more.

Would you please make a gift, and would you reach out to some friends today to invite them to join with you in your efforts to build a better world?

In friendship,
Melissa Ajabshir

ProNica Newsletter

December 2015, Vol 28 No 4

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ProNica's Vision is solidarity that educates and empowers 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.

The 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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Letter from our Co-Program Directors in Nicaragua



Dear Friends,

As we round out 2015, we can't thank all of you enough for investing in the dreams of the project partners here in Nicaragua. As we recall their tenacity over the past year, the names Silvia, Chayito, Adilia, Yorlene, Enrique and far too many others to list spring to our

minds. It has been such a privilege to walk with all nine of these amazing grassroots initiatives in their work on the front lines.

In the midst of the significant cost of living increases in Nicaragua (and subsequently, operational costs), and a continuous reduction of international aid, along with increasing vulnerability to the effects of climate change, our Nicaraguan community partners somehow continue their creative and rebellious journey against adversity and toward justice.

In addition to the daily services provided, the partners organized a great series of activities on gender equity, violence prevention, conflict resolution and participatory education. Through these efforts the Casa Materna, Acahual Women's Center, Los Quinchos, Casa del Niño, Rio Blanco Domestic Violence Network, Martin Centeno Community, the Estelí and Achuapa Libraries, and AVP facilitators, advanced the global task to address the root causes of poverty.

A profound sense of comradery has accompanied us in this challenging but joyful path of solidarity. As we transition into 2016, we will continue finding new and creative ways to strengthen ProNica's mission. We wish you the very best, and we are immensely grateful and honored by your walk in friendship with ProNica and the inspiring grassroots partners.

In gratitude,
Ada López Rivera & Ramón Sepúlveda Vélez

A Year in the Lives of Communities on the Front Lines of Poverty & Hope: 2015 Project Partner Review



The leadership team at Acahual contributes to change in their community by helping women in Managua empower themselves

Acahual Women's Center

The oldest neighborhood in Managua, Acahualinca has historically suffered from flooding, contamination and poverty. In 2015, the perpetual

poverty continued its toll on women of the community through inter-familial violence, teen pregnancy and cervical cancer. The Acahual Center responded with holistic services, including psychological, medical, legal, human rights and vocational rehabilitation (beauty school). They built many new relationships with neighborhood women, offering individual and group therapy, free Pap smears, biopsies, ultrasounds and HIV counseling—without age, race or religious distinction. The health promoters from their, "*Permanent Campaign to Prevent Cervical Cancer*" educated young women about sexual rights, risks and methods of prevention. In a truly holistic spirit, they also ran the library and preschool, places of learning and imagination for people of all ages.

Achuapa Library



The Love for Reading Initiative took the Achuapa Library to remote villages, schools & homes

For many years, ProNica supported the small town of Achuapa through various cultural, health and agricultural projects, including a small library. The 2015 the *Love for Reading Initiative* took the Achuapa Library to the people, visiting schools, community centers and even private

homes to encourage elders, adolescents, and very young children to love reading and to use it to expand their minds, culture and capacity. The project enjoyed tremendous success, benefiting over 600 residents of Achuapa through reading contests, story circles, and drawing therapy. But the librarian's favorite part was visiting the Casa Materna, where pregnant women and their in-utero babies were read to. Not only did this contribute to a creative healing energy for the mothers, but the hope is that it also initiated a life-long "Love for Reading" for the soon-to-be-born!

Alternatives to Violence Project

This year marked the 40th Anniversary of the Alternatives to Violence (AVP) program world-wide, and many Quakers and others dedicated to non-violence



Rural health promoters participate in a trust building exercise just before role playing new ways to respond to conflict

sponsored AVP workshops in Nicaragua as part of the ongoing commitment to building peace. Facilitators who were trained by ProNica partner Harold Urbina over the past year collaborated with retired US Nurse Dorothy Granada to offer AVP workshops for midwives, health promoters and community leaders from the organization, "*This Way for Life and Peace.*"

The 2015 workshops were useful to both individuals and communities. They provided tools to address violence in individuals' lives; namely communication, tolerance and personal safety, and then many used those methods in turn to resolve conflicts in their communities. As Dorothy is well-known for her work in northern communities torn apart by war during the 1980s, it is notable that this work continues to be relevant for emerging leaders facing the more subtle but equally destructive violence of poverty and organized crime.

Partner Communities continues p. 4

Los Quinchos



Los Quinchos/Yahoskas teen beams after winning a speech competition for her entire municipality

Since 1992, Los Quinchos has offered a home, education, sports, art and nutrition to Nicaragua's abandoned children. While originally these were orphans of the war, the subsequent years of economic devastation and struggle have produced many more children with nowhere else to turn but the streets to survive. Since the Sandinista return to power, public schools, housing projects, and other social initiatives have

reduced the number of street children found in the markets, parks and at traffic lights. Los Quinchos has evolved to service a variety of high risk youth populations, such as children removed from their homes due to abuse and adolescents with chronic addictions. In 2015, in addition to caring for 150 youth at the "El Filtro" outreach house in Managua, "Las Yahoskas" home for girls and "Los Cachorros" farm for boys in San Marcos; Los Quinchos also offered successful electronics workshops and vocational training for young men escaping gang life.

Library of Estelí

The Estelí Library had another successful year, promoting reading activities at local schools, reading aloud in the family, and arts & crafts workshops with recycled materials. They are proud to report that the youth in their programs participated in critical thinking & imagination development activities beyond what they would ordinarily be exposed to. The participatory evaluations conducted by the librarians showed that the children loved sharing their varied interpretations of the stories, and they exchanged drawings with their classmates, which motivated even more children to participate. The library's quality programs were in high demand this year, with each of the public schools requesting on-site reading activities to engage with students and complement their literature and writing classes. This was a dream come true for the librarians, as they were able to introduce the joy of reading to over 800 students.

Martin Centeno Community

In 2015, the Martin Centeno Rural Action Committee hired community members to repair and "bring dignity" to three of the most impoverished family homes, and to construct a hanging bridge linking the rural community to the rest of the municipality. During the rainy season, sturdy bridges are essential for students and workers to travel safely outside of the neighborhood. They also repaired the community center where neighborhood assemblies, workshops, classes & cultural activities are held.



As part of their vision and hope for the future, the Martin Centeno Action Committee repairs or rebuilds a few homes each year that are in most disrepair in the community

Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman



A ProNica volunteer learns about Casa Materna's pioneering model and training offered for international medical teams

The Casa Materna in Matagalpa is the pioneer model for intervention in high risk pregnancies in Nicaragua, having consistently provided high quality care and shelter for pregnant women in

the region for decades. In 2015 the Nicaraguan government continued building Casa Maternas based on their model to help achieve the national infant and maternal mortality goals.

The Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman boasts 320 successful pregnancies this year, in addition to 83 sterilizations. While the idea can be uncomfortable for some, sterilization is a critical service for women such as Juana, who came from the Northern Autonomous Region, where she had to travel three hours by foot, two hours

by horse and eight hours by vehicle in order to get to the Casa Materna to prepare for her 16th child. Many women are too remote or religiously restricted from seeking birth control. The Casa Materna also visited rural areas to educate families about fertility, birth control, pregnancy infant care, yoga and more.

Saving Species along Nicaragua's Inter-Oceanic Canal Route

A primary cause of biodiversity loss in 2015 was habitat destruction from exploitation, deforestation and pollution. In response to further threat by the planned canal, ProNica partnered with scientist Jorge Huete-Perez and his work with the University of Central America. His team is creating a baseline DNA registry of existing species along the canal route.



As a child of the revolution from humble beginnings and now as a scientist, he is determined to give back to his country. Jorge wrote that, "Many future treatments/cures...may be hidden among this unexplored biodiversity (think aspirin and quinine)..."

Rio Blanco Women's Cooperative

The Cooperative was formed to empower women in the Río Blanco municipality, including the villages of Martín Centeno, Walter Calderón, Germán Pomares, La Sandino, San Pedro Wanawana, La Ponzóna, Puente de Paiwas, San Ignacio, and El Martillo. In 2015 the Cooperative continued investing in solutions at the intersections of socio-economic challenges ranging from reforestation to intervention in domestic violence.

This partner is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change that have devastated Nicaragua's agriculture, and they are actively working on climate resilience. Due to infrequent rains, crops from across the country have been lost, and prices of basic food items including Nicaragua's signature red beans are soaring. Nonetheless, cooperative members worked with

participants to achieve 90% of their production goals, providing gardens for 57 families who in some cases were even able to sell the additional produce in the community. The families learned permaculture and organic gardening techniques, while supplementing nutritional and medicinal needs. Participants learned to use their patios, plastic bottles, old tires and other items traditionally considered waste for gardening.



The Rio Blanco Cooperative worked on climate resilience by provided gardens for 57 families using plastic bottles, old tires and other usually discarded items

The cooperative also established relationships with the Ministries of Agriculture and Health, supplementing the trainings in ways that should continue to bear fruit, both figuratively and literally, as well as rice in the future.

Casa del Niño

Casa del Nino provided 224 women with potentially lifesaving Pap smears, as well as birth control counseling and accompaniment. These important services helped the Casa solidify and build new relationships with poor, young and marginalized women, who benefited emotionally in addition to their physical health.



Woman benefitting from Casa del Nino microloan makes beautiful recycled paper products

The Casa coordinated with the Fara Clinic and the FINLAY Lab to treat women with HPV. Special outreach about uterine and cervical cancer was organized for the Sex Education Fair and the Municipal Fair, as well as a focus group of adolescents who were embarrassed to seek care elsewhere.

Paving the Path to Global Understanding and Peace: 2015 Educational Program Highlights

One especially serene day in August, surrounded by the lush green mountains of San Ramón, project partners from across Nicaragua joined members of the **Just Peace Circles** delegation for a healing retreat. On one side of the circle, Nikki Hatch, an acupuncture student from Maryland, shared her deep admiration for the courage and determination of the project partners. On the other side of the circle, Enrique Centeno, a member of the Martín Centeno Action Committee—founded by peasants displaced from the war in the 1980s—expressed deep appreciation for the affectionate bonds he felt with the group. Historical barriers were traversed by playing, singing, talking, reflecting and working together. The experience epitomized the power of bringing diverse people together among visiting groups and the partners in 2015:

Rutgers University students installed a portable solar power system so the Casa Del Niño nurse could conduct life-saving Pap smears in the distant indigenous community of San Pablo.

Washburn University continued its longstanding relationship with the community of El Limon, challenging students to deepen their understanding about the roots of poverty, Nicaraguan culture and our shared desire to move forward.



One of the members of the August Healer Delegation, Rebecca Wheaton-Gonzalez, leads retreat participants in yoga

Passion Project Photography Group joined young artists from different traditions and witnessed the transformational power of art education during their time at the Casa del Niño Art School.

The College of New Jersey Bonner Scholars

worked side by side with residents of Los Quinchos, building impressive leadership and resiliency together.

Haverford College sent five summer interns. They were placed with ProNica partners in Rio Blanco, San Ramón and San Marcos. The interns were very impressed by the remarkable work of Casa del Niño, Rio Blanco Domestic Violence Network and Los Quinchos.

Managua Friends Worship Group Anchored Quaker House in 2015



Quaker House caretaker Jose Antonio with his wife, son and mother, Panchita, our housekeeper

In 2015 the **Casa Cuáquera** guest house received educational delegations, peace groups & solidarity workers, all warmly welcomed by beloved staff members Panchita Fletes and Jose Antonio Castillo.

Gathering in worship on the Quaker House patio since 1983, The Managua Worship

attenders over the year. Friends often cited the deep sharing during “twilight meeting” at rise of worship as a great blessing, as well as the unique bond they share around the love of and commitment to Nicaragua.

Several Managua Quakers went through times of sorrow and difficulty, as well as times of growth and change over the course of the year, and their fellowship served as a great source of comfort.

They continued to welcome and enjoy sharing with many visitors, both individuals and groups. The Worship Group meets twice a month, usually on the 1st and 3rd Sundays. All are welcome!

Group served as Quaker House’s spiritual anchor yet again in 2015 with about 10 regular

Quaker House: nicaragua@pronica.org
Worship Group: pat@jhc-cdca.org

Join the Partners in their Dreams to Deliver Even More Results & Opportunities for Families, Children and Communities in 2016

Acahual Women's Center \$18,349 would enable them to continue their critical services to the women of Acahualinca, with a special focus on teen mothers. Integrating health education & services with human rights & women's empowerment, they invite ProNica members to Managua to visit the Beauty School, Library and Permanent Campaign Against Cervical Cancer.

Achuapa Library \$1,000 would sponsor another year of the mobile "Love to Read" initiative. 317 books are specifically requested, including child and adolescent literature, and textbooks on philosophy, math, law, biology, zoology, ecology, Spanish grammar and history.

Alternatives to Violence Project \$4,250 would cover all participant costs for 5 workshops: two introductory, two advanced & one for facilitators. They will focus on energetic, participatory techniques this year that don't require writing so as to include everyone, including those with lower levels of literacy.

Casa del Niño \$3,446 would strengthen Casa del Niño's Family Economics & Sustainable Agriculture programs in San Ramón, which would offer microcredit to 12 program participants to increase their productivity and wellbeing. Half the interest generated from these loans would go to subsidize Pap smears for female beneficiaries.

Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman \$5,000 would help them continue providing high quality & loving services to women with high risk pregnancies. By hosting 30-35 women per month, they aim to help safely bring over 400 babies into the world.

Estelí Public Library \$1,612 would finance the mobile literacy services for 320 children & youth in San Pedro and La Sirena, two remote rural communities in the region without libraries or adequate reading activities in their schools.



As Haverford College student departs the Martin Centeno Community, there is a sense that a seed of solidarity has been planted, an encouraging reminder that in our aspirations for global peace, "All the flowers of tomorrow are found in the seeds of today."

Los Quinchos \$34,617 would provide nutritional meals for 150 youth participants, staff the library in the cultural center, and finance regular visits from youth to each of the four locations.

Martín Centeno Community \$2,701 would finish repairs to the community center, a continuation of a 2015 project. It would also light the outdoor basketball court for evening athletic activities for youth and adults, and repair at least one more home for "dignity."

Rio Blanco Women's Cooperative \$5,500 would provide violence prevention training and psychological support to survivors of domestic violence, as well as increase production capacity of rice, beans and corn with the construction of an office and storage silo.

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

Donation ☐\$25 ☐\$50 ☐\$75 ☐\$100 ☐\$250 ☐\$500 ☐Other _____

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Engaging in the Practice of Peace



In 2015 Quakers and a great
diversity of other friends came
together around the common
concerns of solidarity with
Nicaraguans & education for
social change.

Thank You!

2015 Annual Report