



PRONiCA

News from Nicaragua

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Quakers in Solidarity with Nicaraguans for 28 Years

Why Keep Returning to Nicaragua?

By Martha Morris, stateside volunteer

Why lead delegation after delegation of college students or other visitors to Nicaragua?

“In a nutshell”, explains ProNica stateside director Melissa Ajabshir, “rather than a model of bringing people from the global north to serve people of the global south... we work to facilitate transformation, where students encounter marginalized people but also learn about our intertwined histories and meet the inspiring people who are changing lives and improving conditions in their communities.”

Rick Ellis became acquainted with ProNica and its aspirations when his son, then a student at Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, FL, got to know Davida Johns, then stateside director of ProNica. The student and his faculty advisor arranged for a trip to Nicaragua with ProNica.

Hearing of his son's experiences, Rick, a professor at Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, was motivated to lead his own student group to Managua. The delegations fit right in with Rick's work at Washburn, since he organizes and manages student volunteer work there, too.

He noticed that his first ProNica trip “was very different from other study trips. It involved personal change, not just visits to museums.” He has led seven more delegations since then.

What has Rick observed? “Many of the students start with no sense of the historical U.S. involvement in other countries. They begin to question what is happening around them.

“And the ProNica staff provides experiences allowing the students to work in community in a much deeper way. They begin to see what people can accomplish at a grass-roots level. They return to school inspired to work in the U.S. and around the world, for example by expanding and developing the literacy program at Washburn,” Rick reflects.

When kids come back, their peers recognize that they have changed. “Part of the change comes from staying with families there. When they see the struggles the Nicaraguans



face, they realize that their own struggles are do-able.”

Professor Rick Ellis hauls water in El Limón to the project where he and his students labor along side members of the community.

Even more important to Rick, however, is that delegation travelers come back feeling they can accomplish change even with few resources. They do not feel the need to wait for large organizations to act. “When they return, they see how much they can do because they have seen, for example, a women's clinic built from very few resources. The delegation members feel more competent.”

The students “feel that they can do something about poverty. They can be creative, roll up their sleeves” and act, like the Nicaraguans they have met, Rick notes.

Staying with families allows the students to make personal connections with their hosts and with each other, Rick notices. After five days in El Limón, the students returned to Kansas and raised the money for the town to finish its electrification project.

And while in Nicaragua, the students gather every evening to reflect on what they are getting out of the trip.

Summarizes the professor: “ This is one of the more powerful international experiences kids can have.” □

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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.

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Harold Urbina Represents Nicaragua at AVP Global Gathering



Latin American contingency to the Gathering in Ireland

The 2014 Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) International Gathering was held in Ireland. There were 154 participants from 43 countries including ProNica's esteemed collaborator, Harold Urbina, as the representative from Nicaragua.

The theme of the Gathering was "Diversity and Sustainability." Twenty first century issues like cyberbullying and gangs were brought into focus. Political and social conflicts were examined through the lens of AVP's work with the Northern Ireland Peace Process and workshops at Wheatfield Prison. □

ProNica Partners Join Retreat in the Tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh



Monks guide staff and partners in walking meditation

Last fall, 17 people from ProNica, including staff and project partners, participated in a retreat with monastics in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh from Plum Village, France.

Staff members, Laura Hopps and Milton García, volunteered to organize the event in their spare time as a gift to ProNica partners and Quaker House staff. It turned out to be a beautiful training in cultivating peace in every day life. The monastics donated funds to plant 500 fruit trees in Rio Blanco through the women's cooperative as carbon off-setting for their trip.

Since attending, Zelinda Rocchia, founder of Los Quinchos, reported that she's practiced mindful walking and breathing exercises with the children. □

Casa Materna Lights the Way for Change in Maternal Health

By Kitty Madden, Casa Materna Volunteer Social Worker

We began simply – a tiny light illuminating the darkness of maternal death in Nicaragua in 1990. Little did we know then that our Casa Materna would be a vital spark— lighting the way for widespread systemic change in maternal health care in Nicaragua—a revolutionary change that was accomplished by peaceful means. This peaceful foundation is what continues to set us apart from other similar programs being instituted throughout the country today.

As we begin our 25th year, we remember how in 1990, a woman died giving birth *every minute of every day* somewhere in the world. This daily death rate of 1,440 mothers made no headlines, nor was it mentioned on the nightly news. It was called the “silent epidemic.” In Nicaragua, the reported rate back then was 190 maternal deaths/100,000 live births and in some parts of the mountainous Matagalpa region the rate was as high as 375. Women died because they had no voice and they didn’t count, especially in a country recovering from a violent counter-revolution.

The idea of the Casa Materna grew out of a peaceful movement that was started by Mary Ann Jackman, the young Nicaraguan sociologist for whom the Casa is named. She gathered a group to find ways for women to help other women. After the tragic accident that took her life, the group continued to meet and take positive action through international solidarity.

Mariana Yonug Blanco from Venezuela had the initial idea for the Casa Materna. In 1988, Maria Cavalleri, an Italian midwife, Edith Gonzalez, a Nicaraguan nurse, and

Gloria Compte, a Spanish pediatrician, joined together to write a formal proposal to El Instituto de la Mujer, a women’s group in Spain. Purchased in 1990, the Casa building was in essence a gift from the people of Cuba.

We are now one of more than 100 Casa Maternas in Nicaragua, thanks to the United Nations’ Millennium

Goals and the availability of loans from the World Bank. Nicaragua’s Ministry of Health has now made a commitment to identifying and caring for rural mothers at risk, providing important pre-natal and post-natal services. We regard our success as a major precursor to this movement, although we are the only Casa Materna in the Matagalpa



A mother receives her daily morning check-up at Casa Materna

region that specializes in high-risk pregnancies.

Recent updates on the Millennium Goals show a 47% decrease in maternal death worldwide since 1990. In Nicaragua, the reported decrease is closer to 74%. We are grateful to ProNica and others who have been part of this “silent revolution,” that has enabled Nicaragua to meet its Goal.

Looking back to 1990 at the small spark of light that was our beginning, a light fueled by international solidarity, we give thanks for the beacon that the Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman has become for the women we serve and for those developing similar programs. We are especially grateful for our committed staff who have welcomed more than 17,000 mothers and newborns and created an oasis of compassionate care.

We also give profound thanks for ProNica and all the other friends who have helped make a place of peaceful birthing possible. □

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Education for Social Change is both Meaningful and Fun for Bryn Mawr/Haverford Delegates



Students chose beans and buried them in a bowl of soil, sharing what they hoped to learn or experience during the delegation.



On the last day of the delegation, the students were presented with their sprouted beans as they reflected on their hopes from the first day.

Out on the Quaker House patio with the beckoning sounds of Managua drifting in, Ramón and Ada of ProNica wrapped up sheets of paper and mysteriously taped them.

It was the very first morning of the Bryn Mawr/Haverford delegation, and while Ramón played the ukulele, the group passed around the balls of paper, one-by-one.

When the music stopped, whoever had a ball, had to unwrap it and read the colloquial Nicaraguan word tucked inside.

Then laughter and intrigue abounded as everyone tried to guess what each word meant.

After carefully teaching the words to everyone, Ramón and Ada encouraged the group to use them during their rural homestays.

A fun ice breaker on the very first day ended up deepening the experience all through the trip, especially with the host families during homestays in San Ramón. □



The delegation participants chuckled as they learned that the colloquial Nicaraguan word, “Chunche” loosely translates to, “Thingy.”



Bryn Mawr/Haverford group surrounds ProNica’s co-program directors, Ramón and Ada, just before students and professors pack to return to the states.

The Love Behind the Work at Acahualt Women’s Center

By Emily Bamforth, Bryn Mawr/Haverford delegate

The week we spent in Nicaragua as a delegation was a constant and fluid experience of inspiration and growth. We came from an academic background, arriving after studying issues of reproductive health and justice throughout the semester. But our trip to Nicaragua helped us to learn in a manner far deeper and more personal than academic.

The women we met taught us more about strength, sincerity, and solidarity. Colectivo de Mujeres de Matagalpa stunned us with relentless dedication and determination. Acahualt Women’s Clinic showed us the significance of love and compassion. Corriente Feminista smacked us in the face with immense energy and unwavering passion. The leaders of these organizations taught us what it means to be passionate about women’s health.

It is these individual faces and stories that will stand out the most to me when I recall our time in Nicaragua. Particularly one valued moment, when a woman, fighting back tears, shared her own personal connection to the work with us, a room of somewhat random 20-year-old Americans and complete strangers. She explained to us how she transformed her own experience with domestic abuse into a catalyst to fight against domestic violence throughout the country. She presented us with the weight of her own personal experiences. Authentic and unabashed, she taught us more than could ever be learned in a classroom. I will never forget the authenticity, grace and strength of that moment.

The women I met in Nicaragua demonstrated to us the love behind the hard work that they do. Thank you for sharing that love with us. □

Rural Homestay in San Ramon Orients Students in Community

By Colleen Cumberpatch, Bryn Mawr/Haverford delegate

Throughout the Bryn Mawr/Haverford delegation in Nicaragua, I was constantly overwhelmed by the different sights and scenes. Now, I mean “overwhelmed” in the best possible way: the amazing colors on signs, painted houses-turned-shops, and repainted school buses; the smells of gasoline and corn grilling on the side of the road in Managua, and the fresh mountain air of Matagalpa; the sounds of honking horns, shouted greetings across streets, and the chorus of bargaining voices.

All of these things were stimulating in the best ways. However, I often found myself wondering where I was, in relation to both the rest of Nicaragua, and the city or town itself. Because we spent so much time travelling, it was hard to get oriented within a city or neighborhood in such a short amount of time. It was easy to zone out, staring out the window at the sights speeding by, but I wanted to be able to orient myself in a context, in a neighborhood, in a community.

Our homestay in San Ramón relieved that desire. I was placed with a fellow classmate, Emily, in the home of María, her husband, and her several children and grandchildren. I am not even sure what the actual number of people in the house was, because family members and friends would come and go as the evening drew on. During our homestay, we watched the baseball playoff game between Baltimore (my hometown) and Kansas City, very quickly cheering together as the game went on. Though the

Orioles’ loss was heartbreaking, the connection between Emily and me and our host family had been sparked.

For the rest of the evening, we spent a lot of time with Juan, María’s grandson who is in fifth grade. Emily only speaks a little Spanish, and I was still feeling self-conscious about my ability, but we spent much of the evening communicating beautifully through laughter and silly faces.

It was wonderful to witness how people of every tongue can communicate in a way that transcends spoken language.

The next morning, Juan took us on a tour around his neighborhood: to his school, to various parks, and simply up and down familiar streets. It was in these hours in San Ramón, walking around the neighborhood and creating connections with a family, that I truly felt oriented and grounded in Nicaragua. We were able to get a sense of the personality and feel of San

Ramón, and discover little places that were important or special to a young boy who has spent his entire life there.

Leaving our homestay later that day was much sadder than I had expected coming into the experience. Emily and I were both wishing that we had more time with this beautiful family. The time we spent with them provided the necessary grounding in a community that I was looking for, not to mention gave us the chance to create short, yet meaningful, relationships with a wonderful group of people. □



Colleen with Emily Bamforth and their homestay family in San Ramón

Q & A with Acahualt Women’s Center Health Promoter, Janet Zárate

By Tiffany Smith, Haverford College volunteer

Tiffany: You have told me a lot about what needs to change in support of women, but what is one thing that has already changed here in Nicaragua or is changing now?

Janet: In addition to the ongoing struggles, I would point to the empowerment of women as something that has changed. They can now say, “Okay, no more,” in their homes, with their companions.

Tiffany: And where do you see further options for change?

Janet: If we give more strength and resources to organizing women to empower themselves... We have made many

significant achievements, like men taking personal responsibility for family planning by having vasectomies after attending our community workshops.

We feel at Acahualt, that it’s truly a process to reach the community. But due to reduced funding from a Spanish aid agency, I don’t want to imply that it’s failing, but we need more resources to keep up this program.

We need to go from house to house more frequently so that women can continue to mobilize and increase empowerment. □

What Can We Do to Live Justly?

By Michaela Saunders, Washburn University delegation staff leader

What does justice look like? What can we do to live justly? We'll spend a lot of time answering these questions throughout our lives.

The experience our Washburn University students have, thanks to ProNica and its partners, encourages them to begin exploring that question for themselves. Quaker House provides visual reminders of this question with its posters of social justice heroes, quotes and photographs. The students experience what it means to organize as they work along-side community members in El Limon. And each year, the students are able to hear a brief history lesson of Nicaragua, and Nicaraguan-U.S. relations, from Mark Lester, of the Center for Global Education.

Lester has lived in Nicaragua since 1985, originally coming to the country through his work as a pastor. He is a wealth of information about the important dates, players, political system and impact of United States influence in Nicaragua over time.

He told us about the influence of the United States that occurred even back in the 1800s, when the two political parties curried favor with the US to get support for their unique agendas. There were U.S. Marines in Nicaragua in 1908 and from 1912-1933, Lester

"Quaker House provides visual reminders of this question with its posters of social justice heroes, quotes and photographs."



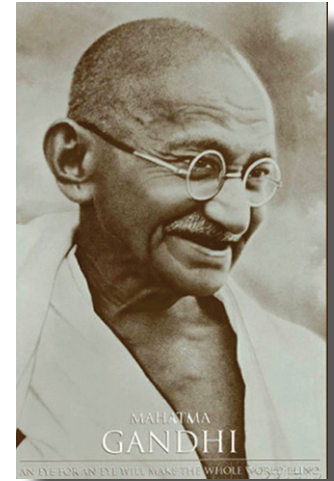
explained. Decades later, the U.S. involvement played out in what we in America know as the "Iran-Contra Affair" and what is known in Nicaragua as The Insurrection. Most here believe the Revolution is what occurred from July 19, 1979 when the Somoza dictatorship was overthrown until 1990 when Chamorro was elected.

Lester told us about the continued U.S. involvement in Nicaragua, and how many of the same tactics used to convince the American people of the need for involvement in Nicaragua in the 1980s were used — by many of the exact same people — to make the case for invasion of Iraq.

While who the "good guys and bad guys" are continues

to be murky today, our history lesson gave us an awareness of that murkiness, of all the layers of truth and reality involved in something so complicated. And we will hopefully be ready to question more, and deeper, when something just doesn't feel right.

Through Lester's suggestions, some of the students have returned home truly changed. They are seeking alternative news sources, asking more questions and reflecting on how their own actions impact others. ProNica made that possible. □



Los Quinchos College Scholarship Recipient Thanks The College of New Jersey

By David Mercado, graduate of Los Quinchos and current employee of the Quinchos Filter House

I am studying tourism and hotel administration. Since I was young, I have wanted to learn about different places and have enjoyed meeting the foreign visitors to Los Quinchos. Los Quinchos is a wonderful place, and when we were children, we liked to share our life at Los Quinchos with others.

This year, in January, I began to study my intended career. I am thankful for the scholarship that was established by The College of New Jersey delegation. I enjoy studying tourism and hotel administration for what it gives me as well as for the possibilities to learn so much about my country, such as the history and wonderful places. Also, I like to socialize

with people from other countries. I have already spent six months studying, and I am proud for the assistance of Los Quinchos as well as for TCNJ's support. Thank you for the scholarship. □



TCNJ Students and Quinchos collaborate on service project. Proceeds from the delegation established a Quinchos College Scholarship Fund

Visit to Los Quinchos Touches Hearts and Minds

By Hayley Normandin, Washburn University delegate

During our January trip to Nicaragua from Washburn University in Kansas, we visited Los Quinchos Finca, a farm for boys. Many of the kids were rescued from the streets of Managua, and some arrived from unstable homes. Although a few have families they are able to visit, some are completely alone. Los Quinchos provides them with the family that many of them previously lacked.

As we pulled up to the farm in the van, a group of younger boys came running and hopping in excitement; many didn't have shoes on and were wearing worn out clothing. We could barely open the van door before they were reaching for hugs, eager to show us their home. A young boy about 7 years old latched on to me and pulled me through the trail to show me all of the farm animals, buildings, and even the plants. Although we couldn't understand each other because of the language barrier, his smile couldn't get any wider, and his affection was priceless.

Then as we caught up with the rest of the group, the boys climbed mandarin trees and threw oranges to us. They were so proud of this and made sure to share the fruit with everyone. We then made our way back to the courtyard where the older boys played soccer with Samuel from our group and Jose Antonio of ProNica. The rest of us girls played with the other kids by coloring, swinging and picking flowers. I shared some jelly beans that I had in my

bag, and the kids were incredibly appreciative. The joy that came from these children was contagious, and everyone seemed to be in complete bliss. Saying goodbye to the boys was difficult. We all shared hugs and farewells like we had known each other our whole lives.



Washburn U Student Hayley Normandin at Los Quinchos

Next we traveled down the road to Los Quinchos girls' home, Las Yahoskas. The girls were a little more reserved than the boys. However, after some warming-up, they began to play some organized games like Duck, Duck, Goose or Cat & Mouse. A few girls were still shying away on the side, so I offered to comb and braid their hair. Then one of the older girls braided my hair as well. By the end of the visit almost everyone's hair was braided! This was also a bittersweet goodbye as we hugged the girls and went on our way.

The experiences that day at Los Quinchos and Las Yahoskas created a humbling memory that I am confident I will never forget. I feel incredibly lucky that I have a supportive family to go home to and the circumstances I have been blessed with—especially when these children have so little but love so much. Someone once told me that stuff is meant to be used and people are meant to be loved, yet too often we love stuff and use people. The children I encountered today reminded me of how irrelevant stuff is compared to people; and for this I am thankful. □

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Casa
Cuáquera



Quaker House staff Jose Antonio and Panchita 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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Challenged but not Condemned - a Witness Tour Reflection

By Ed Lesnick, Friends Witness participant

In the center of Managua, Nicaragua stands the old cathedral. During the 1972 earthquake it was severely damaged. Today, it is a condemned, empty shell. The cathedral is too precious to demolish and too expensive to repair. To me, it will forever be a spiritual symbol of the people and people's places we visited in our ProNica Quaker witness. They are young and old—too precious to be forgotten by our short memories. They are people who are challenged—but not condemned—in their material plight. They are people who are striving to build community in solidarity.



Catedral de Santiago
The Old Cathedral of Managua

To organize a Witness Tour for your civic organization, church, family, Quaker meeting or other group, please visit us on the web at:
www.ProNica.org/Tours/ or call 727-821-2428