



# PRONiCA

## News from Nicaragua

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*Quakers in Solidarity with Nicaraguans for 28 Years*

June 2015  
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### **A Tribute to Father Denis Hébert: Honoring a Life Committed to Peace & Solidarity**

By Laura Hopps, ProNica Program Director Emeritus

On April 14th, dear friend of ProNica and the people of Nicaragua, Father Denis Hébert passed away at his home in Managua. He was a cherished guide for ProNica, a long-time member of the local Consejo advisory counsel, and founder of the organization Foundation for Community Development in Managua (FUNDACCO). He was a friend to many and pillar of the international solidarity community in Nicaragua, and he will be dearly missed.

Denis was born in Villeneuve, Alberta, Canada, a small farming community, and was one of 15 children. He entered seminary at a young age, and went to Lima, Peru in 1969. He came to Nicaragua in 1990 and worked in solidarity with marginalized communities for the past 25 years.

Maria Elena, Director of ProNica partner community in Acahualinca, remembers Fr. Denis in the early years of his time in Nicaragua. She went with him to Ometepe Island in the 90s to help establish the very first community library on the island. He would support many other community-based efforts, including urban clinics, rural lending programs, and youth formation initiatives.

Later, he would found the Foundation for Community Development (FUNDACCO- Fundacion para el Desarrollo Communidatio) based on Catholic Social Teachings. FUNDACO continues to carry on Fr. Denis's legacy,

promoting sustainable development work in urban and rural communities throughout Nicaragua.

Fr. Denis has served as a local advisory board member of ProNica for many years. Program Directors of past and current generations are grateful for his wisdom, insights, and commitment to supporting ProNica's mission. All of

the ProNica staff, board, community partners, and volunteers, express gratitude for the testimony of Fr. Denis's life and his unwavering support. May he rest in peace and in the Light.

Former Program Director, Lillian Hall, recalled: "Denis was someone who walked the walk with grace, humility, a sense of humor and wisdom. The

way he lived and the beliefs he expressed were in harmony. He lived simply, in a working class

neighborhood of Managua where gangs and drug use prevailed, and worked with the youth to give them a better future. He always sought to see things from the perspective of the most marginalized- and he reminded us of the importance of doing the same."

We are grateful for Denis's example of a radical life committed to solidarity, simplicity, and working to build the Kingdom of God on Earth, and we aspire to carry on his legacy in our hearts. □



Father Denis (center) at Quaker Houe in 1993, close to the time he helped found ProNica's advisory board in Nicaragua, the *Consejo*

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### ProNica Board

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### Other Contributors:

Bette Rainbow Hoover	Laura Hopps
A. Catherine Bitners	Claire Reitz
Kimberly E. Benson	Mark Donovan

**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.

### ProNica Stateside Office

130 Nineteenth Avenue Southeast  
St Petersburg, Florida 33705-2810  
stateside@pronica.org  
727.821.2428

### El Centro de los Amigos

managua@pronica.org, 011.505.2266.0984

### Quaker House Managua

managua@pronica.org, 011.505.2266.3216

## Fatima Finds the Oficina de la Mujer and a New Life

By Melissa Ajabshir, ProNica Executive Director

Seeking freedom, “Fatima” slept the first night away from her husband in a field—while it rained. In the morning, she trudged to the place she had read about on the eye-catching flyers around town. Upon arrival at the *Oficina de la Mujer* (Office of the Woman) in the quaint Nicaraguan town of Rio Blanco, she relayed stories of her years of isolation, the mental cruelty, his control of money, and the beatings.



Doña Adilia outside her home with one of her granddaughters

Doña Adilia and the other women who run the Oficina know that getting away from an abusive relationship isn’t easy, but they assure women that they are not alone in their struggles for justice, and that together, they will overcome.

Fatima reported the abuse to authorities, met with a lawyer and a social worker, and found a place to live—by her own strength and with the accompaniment of the Oficina.

After Fatima finished telling me her story, I asked her how she had managed to get on her feet financially. She slipped out of the Oficina and returned smiling with a display of jewelry that she designs and sells. I purchased a simple, colorful, bead necklace and resolved to wear it as a reminder to share her triumph with others. I can’t thank all of you enough for reading this and helping me fulfill that resolve.



Melissa at a ProNica Board meeting wearing the necklace from Fatima

Reflecting on that day in Rio Blanco from the comfort of the ProNica stateside office, I find myself filled with gratitude for Fatima, for Adilia, for our staff in Nicaragua, and for each and every one of you—for being links in a chain that is transmitting the energy of these unassuming yet powerful social actions, keeping the ProNica wheels of peace rolling forward. □

## Team of Healers to Hold August 2015 Retreat with ProNica Partners



*"It is much easier to begin a war than to end it. And even more difficult to repair its invisible consequences, those stains on the soul that cannot be erased."*

~Carlos Powell, 2002 winner from Nicaragua of the Rulfo International Writers Award in the Human Rights Category

Repairing the damage and building resiliency among those who are working for social justice is essential for peace building anywhere. It's especially important in Nicaragua where people have been buffeted by wars, poverty, earthquakes and storms for many generations. Those who labor on the front-lines are invaluable in transforming the scars of multiple traumas into positive change for individuals and communities. Their work with marginalized people and victims of violence is honorable - and stressful. Finding ways to keep the leadership strong of body, mind and spirit is essential to the long term life and health of the organizations.

A team of healers is coming to Nicaragua in August 2015 to work with ProNica partners. They come to build friendship across cultures and learn about the interconnectedness of US and Nicaraguan history. They come to practice the "Ministry of Pres-ence" and share their healing gifts.

The healing team arrives in Managua on August 13th and spends the night at Quaker House in Managua. The next day they will learn a bit about Nicaragua and visit key sites in the city before heading to the mountains and Matagalpa. The team will settle in at a retreat center just outside the city where they will stay for several days.

Staff and leadership of the partner organizations will join the team at the center for a three day retreat. The team will facilitate a workshop that includes community building, trauma healing awareness and hands on healing and bodywork. Participants in the retreat can expect to

understand more about trauma, build and deepen supportive relationships and learn self-healing techniques.

Upon their return to Quaker House, the team will offer shorter healing workshops in the area of Managua. They will also bask in the physical beauty of the volcanic lakes and beaches as well as shop for souvenirs for loved ones.

The organizer of the team is Bette Rainbow Hoover, a Quaker and recent clerk of Sandy Spring Meeting near Washington DC that is part of the Baltimore Yearly Meeting. The team is co-sponsored by the Meeting's Peace Committee and Just Peace Circles, Inc. Bette has visited Nicaragua many times - beginning in the 80's - and is excited to help organize this initiative. She is a registered nurse, massage therapist, yoga teacher and life-long peace activist. She was a member of the first Friends Peace Team to Burundi of the Great Lakes Region of Africa. She spent a month with the Friends Peace Team-Asia West Pacific in Indonesia. For over a decade she directed the Washington DC office of the Mid-Atlantic Region for the American Friends Service Committee. She is an AVP (Alternatives to Violence) facilitator and leads trauma healing circles.

Other team members are Patti Nesbitt, Hannah Gresser, Amanda Plecha and Bethany Wright. Their healing gifts include acupuncture, energy healing, reflexology, yoga, deep listening and dancing. All are very excited about the opportunity to participate in the healing team hosted by ProNica. They promise to tell others about their experiences upon their return to the States and spread the word about wonderful neighbors and new friends. □

To learn more about the delegation of healers, contact organizer Bette Rainbow Hoover at [bette@justpeacecircles.org](mailto:bette@justpeacecircles.org) or ProNica director Melissa Ajabshir at [stateside@pronica.org](mailto:stateside@pronica.org)

# Mother of Eight Alive with Help of Casa del Niño Mobile Health Clinic

By Ramón Sepulveda, ProNica Program Director

Doña “Victoria” was just over 40-years-old when Casa del Niño coordinator Rosario González first met her. Rosario had traveled with her team to the distant rural community of *El Horno* (The Furnace) as part of their cervical cancer prevention campaign. Rosario recalled that, “Under the scorching sun, there was a group of women walking toward the community church. We called out to them and offered to talk with them about our prevention campaign. They invited us into the church, and there we talked with a small group of women; Victoria was one of them.”

A mother of eight—with a boy and seven girls—Victoria embodies the struggles and joys of many rural Nicaraguan women. As with most of the others gathered in the rustic church that day, Victoria had never heard of cervical cancer. Giggling one moment and quite serious the next, Victoria listened intently to the common myths of cervical cancer, as well as to the facts of this “silent disease” and to the stories of those who’ve battled it.



Rosario González (second from left) with the rest of the Casa del Niño outreach team

Rosario reflected to ProNica staff that, “In addition to limited resources for outreach, cultural beliefs related to “machismo” are among our biggest challenges.”

Victoria was one of the few women that day that timidly moved forward and took advantage of the Pap smear test offered at the mobile clinic. When her results came back showing a high grade of abnormal cells, another “battle” for Victoria began. With the accompaniment of the Casa del Niño staff, Victoria was referred to a treatment clinic in the nearby city of Matagalpa. Recuperation was not an easy path, but as one of Victoria’s daughters earnestly pointed out, “If it hadn’t been for Casa del Niño’s visit to El Horno community, my mom would probably have died within a matter of months or years.”

The daughter’s reaction is what Rosario points out as one of her principal motors and sources of energy to continue working under the challenging conditions that confront Casa del Niño and similar community-based organizations: “We are obviously not happy when the tests come back showing abnormal results, but we think that if it wasn’t for these campaigns, there would be very small chances that women like Victoria would get the treatment and support they need, before is too late.” As Rosario reflected on the challenges and triumphs of the cervical cancer prevention campaign, an unmistakable look of contentment and peace fell over her face. □

## Calling all Artists to Build the Casa del Niño Art Gallery & Cafeteria

Are you a painter, photographer, sculptor, musician or stylist?

Erin, Claire and Aundrea are as well, and they would love for you to join them. As part of a Photography Witness Tour in February, they visited the Escuela del Arte (Art School) run by ProNica partner, Casa del Niño. They were deeply moved by the students learning to express feelings without words, gaining confidence through artistic expression, and quite simply—creating! But their bubble burst for a moment when they discovered that the Art School had run out of building funds right in the middle of construction on the brand new student gallery and cafeteria. When they learned that only \$4,000 was needed



Casa del Niño Art Class

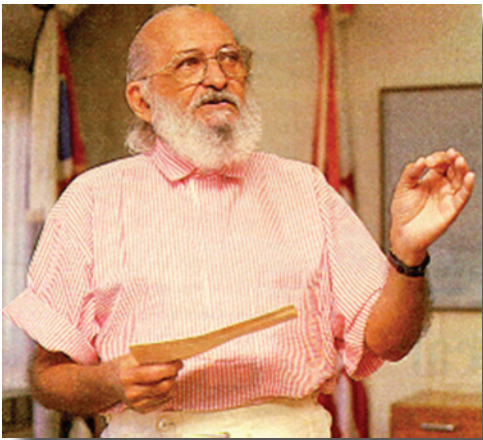
to complete the construction project—in a matter of a few conversations—the *Nica Passion Project* was born.

Since returning to their homes in Kansas, Illinois and Montana—Erin, Claire and Aundrea have connected with their artist networks back home and on the web. They’re asking ProNica artists to

engage as well, and they’ve declared June, *Creatives Give Back Month*, inviting artists everywhere to use your creativity to support the arts in rural Nicaragua. *To make a gift toward the gallery & cafeteria construction project for the Casa del Niño Art School, simply write Art School Gallery in the memo of your check.* □

# Dialogue between Provider & Beneficiary is Fundamental to Acahualt's Methodology and Effectiveness

By A. Catherine Bitners, Bryn Mawr/Haverford Delegate



*"One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes*

*cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding."*  
~Paulo Freire

During several occasions on our delegation to Nicaragua, I was reminded of Paulo Friere, whose writings I studied extensively in a class at Haverford College. Though we studied his work through the lens of education, Friere was—in addition to an educator—a philosopher and social movement theorist. I witnessed his sensibility incorporated into many of the programs and services we learned about in Nicaragua. Considering that Friere's philosophy is equally applicable to political and social action, it isn't surprising that many of the activists we met mentioned Freire's work as a guiding inspiration.

Although I have seen his educational philosophy in practice in the classroom, the delegation to Nicaragua expanded my understanding of Frierean principles as they relate to solidarity work and social action; in particular, NGOs and activists fighting for women's empowerment and health.

I noticed this theme starting on day-one of our delegation, at the Acahualt Women's Center. Acahualt is located in Acahualinca, one of Managua's poorest neighborhoods. It was decimated in the 1972 earthquake, and the process of rebuilding the area has been slow. Most families in the neighborhood are headed by single mothers, who are solely responsible for the economic stability of the household, childcare, and other daily tasks. The Center was started in 1991 when founders Maria Elena Bonilla, Silvia Cizneros, and Norma Villalta saw uterine and cervical cancers

affecting women in the area in alarmingly high numbers. Since these cancers can be avoided with early detection, they set up a clinic in a neighbor's home to provide screenings for women.

Now, over two decades later, the Center has expanded to provide psychological support and therapy to women in abusive relationships, tubaligations (though due to a newly restricted budget, these are no longer available), a preschool, and legal support for women who have experienced domestic violence.

How did they decide which programs to implement and where to expand services? By talking to the women of Acahualinca. The residents directly informed the founders about which services they wished to access. This provided a framework of goals and a trajectory of development for the Center. In this way, the founders of Acahualt broke the traditional power structure between providers and beneficiaries, which results in charity work. Instead, they strove to incorporate the wishes of the local women into the creation of their program, a praxis of solidarity.

**"In this way, the founders of Acahualt broke the traditional power structure between providers and beneficiaries, which results in charity work. Instead, they strove to incorporate the wishes of the local women into the creation of their program, a praxis of solidarity."**

By listening and responding to the community, the Acahualt Women's Center is an important center for women's health and an emblem of hope and progress. The success of their programs is a direct consequence of the Center's outreach model, which relies on the wants of the women they serve to inform program development.

This is precisely what Friere argues in the opening quote I presented; education and/or social change programs will not be impactful unless they are informed by the particular worldview and sensibility of those who they serve. Opening up a dialogue between the providers and the beneficiaries of a program is essential to effecting change. I think, and I believe Friere would also argue, that a relationship of this nature fosters an environment where both the provider and the beneficiary unite to learn from each other and work together for social change.

The driver for social action is the common humanity we feel with others and the desire to learn from and work side-by-side with those who share our passions and goals. □

For more information about ProNica's college delegations visit: <http://pronica.org/students/>

# Folding both Paper and the Girls of Las Yahoskas into our Hearts

By Kimberly E. Benson, member of Annapolis Friends Meeting and Baltimore Yearly Meeting

The ProNica website paraphrases the missions of the Los Quinchos and La Yahoskas programs in terms of reaffirming human rights for children: a secure home, food, shelter, an education, and a peaceful childhood. Basic needs denied children all over the world. Simple requirements even small children can understand and appreciate, but we seldom offer them a means to contribute.

When our family decided to visit Nicaragua, we shared our plans with the First Day School class at Annapolis Friends Meeting (AFM), a Quaker monthly meeting in Maryland under the auspices of Baltimore Yearly Meeting. We explained history of military conflicts and political instability that have undermined the economic and social structures of the country. The children were particularly moved by the problems of domestic violence, abuse, and abandonment of children.

In the United States, where the GNP is high, these problems remain common. Economic prosperity makes them less obvious, but no less present. We see far fewer street children, and issues that occur in the confines of a house are much easier to hide and ignore. The visibility of the Nicaraguan social issues inspired the children of AFM and provided a perspective of how similar issues are plaguing many American families.

The children of AFM were anxious to help and offered to donate funds for charitable donations they received in gratitude for their ongoing participation in AFM markets. AFM holds two markets every year, offering donated goods. In exchange, patrons offer whatever they are willing and able to provide as a donation to the selected recipient organizations. The children participate by offering handcrafts and baked goods and providing musical entertainment.

The children's generous offer inspired individual donations from members of the AFM community. Just weeks before our departure, we found ourselves gathering a wide range of donations. Financial support is always the most fungible form of assistance, but our situation lent itself

to a combination of material and financial contributions. We had more luggage capacity than we intended to use, and the children were excited to share items that they thought the children in Nicaragua would enjoy: crayons, stickers, construction paper, origami paper, hair bands... Items offered as sincere gestures that could help them feel personally connected to the children in country.

I admit that I packed many of these items with some concern. I had tried to maximize the financial contributions and limit the material items that tended to be more expensive and lower quality in country. Even so, I worried that many of our items would seem naïve or even ridiculous in country. Their true value only became apparent on our visit to Las Yahoskas and Los Quinchos. My 9 year old

son Reece, 11 year old daughter Kallan, and I met ProNica director Ramon Sepulveda in Managua and drove to San Marcos where we met about 20 of the Las Yahoskas girls at the Cultural Center. With no common language, we worked on an origami project together. Demonstrating, assisting, laughing, and collaborating, we created origami pigeons, and the girls taught us the Spanish word, *paloma* (pigeon).

Later, we enjoyed tours of their home, graciously hosted by Belen, a graduate of Yahoskas, and then we drove down the road to see the Los Quinchos farm setting. We were impressed

by the care and attention at both facilities, the warm welcome of the children and the staff, the beautiful colorful surroundings, the camaraderie, and exuberance of the children.

We shared all of our experiences with the AFM community when we returned, and ProNica was selected to be a recipient for a share of the proceeds of our Spring Market. The children of meeting were excited by our photos from Los Quinchos and Las Yahoskas, particularly the soccer fields and trophies, farm animals, handcrafts, stage, and musical instruments. But the magic of our visit happened in those first few minutes of origami when we folded the girls into our hearts. □



Making Origami Pigeons together at Las Yahoskas

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/](http://www.ProNica.org/Tours/) or call 727-821-2428

## Welcome Brad Stocker to the ProNica Board of Directors



ProNica Board member and staunch earthcare advocate, Brad Stocker

Brad Stocker was called to education early. His first teaching was when he was just 15 at a day camp teaching swimming and shoe tying. Since then he has taught all levels from pre-k to grad school. While no longer in the employ of others he is still involved in education through workshops and grandchildren.

Brad's first involvement with Nicaragua was in the late 70's when he joined

a solidarity group helping with medicines and literacy supplies. In 1986, his life was radically altered when Tere and two kids, all Nicaraguan born, became his family. Two years after they were all married, Brad received a Fulbright to work at UNA (la Universidad Nacional Agraria) to develop an undergraduate English program. That was when he first met his mother-in-law and learned more deeply the culture of Nicaragua.

Brad considers himself bicultural if not completely bilingual. He didn't begin his Spanish lessons until well into adulthood – not something he recommends. However, it has been essential to who he has become and how his family has evolved.

Brad and Tere support several projects in Nicaragua, and currently Brad follows Tere onto the ProNica Board. ProNica holds a special place in their hearts, not only because of the work that it does but also because it was a ProNica presentation at Miami Friends Meeting that brought them to those Friends where Brad is now a member and Tere is an attender. You may have noticed by now that Brad cannot tell you who he is without Tere. We are nothing outside of our relationships.

Brad and Tere believe in the power of love and that earthcare and solidarity are expressions of it. These two quotes are a reflection of their thoughts on the latter:

*"I don't believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person and learns from the other. I have a lot to learn from other people."*

– Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan social justice activist

*"Love is the most universal, formidable, and mysterious of cosmic energies."*

– Teilhard de Chardin

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

Donation amount: ☐\$25   ☐\$50   ☐\$75   ☐\$100  
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130 19th Ave SE  
St. Petersburg, FL 33705

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[www.ProNica.org](http://www.ProNica.org)

#### **I would like to designate my gift:**

- ☐ Where Most Needed
- ☐ Acahualt Women's Center
- ☐ Los Quinchos/Las Yahoskas
- ☐ Casa del Niño
- ☐ Casa Materna
- ☐ Libraries & Literacy
- ☐ Oficina de la Mujer (Rio Blanco Coop)
- ☐ Martin Centeno Community
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

#### **I'd like to become a sustaining donor:**

Thank you! Monthly gifts provide a predictable source of income to ProNica. To set up secure recurring donations, please visit: [www.ProNica.org/donate/](http://www.ProNica.org/donate/)



Ada & Ramón, ProNica's in-country directors, addressing Florida Quakers during the Southeastern Yearly Meeting Annual Sessions in April

# PRONICA

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130 Nineteenth Avenue Southeast  
Saint Petersburg, Florida 33705-2810

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**[www.ProNica.org](http://www.ProNica.org)**

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## Remembering Annette Donovan and her Abiding Witness



ProNica lost a long-time champion on April 28 when Annette Donovan died peacefully at age 94. Annette and her husband Ted's concern for Nicaragua first manifested in the early to mid-80's when, as part of an ecumenical mid-week worship group, they worked on the establishment of the New Haven (CT)/Leon (Nicaragua) Sister City Project. Their concern developed into a life-long passion upon traveling

to Nicaragua in 1986 as part of a sister city delegation. The opportunity to witness first-hand the struggles of the Nicaraguan people, and experience first-hand their warmth and their welcome, made a lasting impression.



Annette & Ted in 1986 with their host family in Nicaragua

Annette and Ted were members of New Haven Friends Meeting for 6 decades and were regular volunteers in the Sister City Project's Connecticut office for many years. When ProNica was formally established shortly after their return from Nicaragua it became another avenue through which they could support citizen to citizen solidarity with that country. Both of them--and then Annette, following Ted's passing in 2001--were faithful contributors to ProNica; we received Annette's final donation just months before her death. More importantly, they were gentle but persistent advocates for our work and the principles that underlie it.