

NEWS FROM THE ROOFTOP



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Spring 2010

WHY NICARAGUA?

by Charlene Meyer

We're often asked, "Why do you concentrate so much effort on the children of Nicaragua when there are so many in the world today that need help?" Although it grieves us deeply that we can't help every child who is a victim of poverty, there are reasons we keep our focus on Nicaragua:

- Years ago, we fell in love with the warm, friendly people of Nicaragua. We were moved by the extreme poverty we witnessed and wanted to do something to help change lives.
- Nicaragua is a small country bordered by Costa Rica and Honduras (smaller than the state of New York) with a population of less than six million (only double the population of Chicago). In spite of being a 'smaller' organization, we can make a difference in this country that so desperately needs a helping hand.
- We work closely with good people in Nicaragua, on whom we can depend to help identify and oversee projects when we can't be there.
- Our country lies close to theirs (a mere 2 1/2 hours from our U.S. border). We can visit there often to review our projects and track our results.
- Droughts, floods, hurricanes, volcanoes—all are beyond the control



of Nicaraguans and yet they endure them all.

- The poverty in Nicaragua is unimaginable unless you've experienced it firsthand. It is the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with nearly half the population living below the poverty line.

If not us, who? If not now, when?



BRINGING HOPE TO KIDS

NICA NOCHE'S SUCCESS RAISES BAR FOR 2010

Tin Roof Foundation's Nica Noche 2009 was, by every measure, a tremendous success. Proceeds from the annual fundraiser helps bring meal programs, education, medical assistance, and services for special-needs children to very poor families of Nicaragua. Guests enjoyed non-stop entertainment thanks to Shane Harden and the MCC Worship Arts Teams, silent and live auctions with the area's best auctioneer, Bill Bockstahler, terrific photos by Barry Lisner, inspirational guest speakers Quan Truong and David Smith, and performances by Celebration Choir.

"It was awesome," says Kathy Lisner, general chairman of Nica Noche. "But it wouldn't have happened if it hadn't been for a \$50,000 matching gift thanks to the generosity of a local Cincinnati family, and our generous sponsors and donors and the exceptional efforts of Nica Noche Committee and Tin Roof volunteers. I'm so thankful for everybody's help. This year's success means we can set even higher goals for next year."



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MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR NICA NOCHE 2010

This year's Nica Noche will be Saturday, November 6, 2010. It will be an evening you don't want to miss!



TIN ROOF FOUNDATION UPDATES

New La Laguna Meal Center: A Dream Becomes a Reality

Four years ago I was witness to more than 100 children eating lunch in an open-air abandoned coffee plantation structure that had only a partial roof. The back wall was caving in and the floor had deteriorated, leaving only mud and broken cement. Children were sitting on pieces of cement or on the mud floor as they ate their meager lunch.



With the help of Patty Howard (who spearheaded this project), Montgomery Community Church, and many other donors, today there is a clean, safe meal center. Now the children receive their hot nutritious meal that is prepared in a new kitchen area with vented stoves and running water. Thank you Patty for helping make a dream come true!



Special Thanks to Judy Chandler

Thank you Judy for your many years of dedicated service in sending the beautifully written thank you notes. Your labor of love was treasured by hundreds of donors.

THE TIN ROOF FOUNDATION WHO ARE WE?

The Tin Roof Foundation is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to "Bringing Hope to Kids" by providing educational opportunities, meal programs, healthcare to facilitate learning, and economic development assistance for their families, thereby enabling children to escape the spiral of poverty. There are no salaries. All administrative costs are funded by Tin Roof Foundation founders Al and Charlene Meyer. The Tin Roof Foundation, Inc. is incorporated in the State of Ohio. It is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible.

SAVING GABRIELLE

by Charlene Meyer

Gabrielle's fifth birthday is in three days. He is not expecting a birthday cake or a big party with many friends bringing him gifts. He has never experienced such special days in his short life. Instead, he leads a life of misery. One filled with gnawing hunger, illness, and a mother not mentally capable of caring for his daily needs.

We have traveled to Cusmapa, a small town perched 5,000 feet above sea level in the middle of a pine forest on the Nicaragua-Honduras border. The scenery is spectacular, a feeling of being on the top of the world. Last night we watched the sun setting, the red-orange sky seemed to be on fire. There seemed to be such a peace in this remote place. We would soon discover there is misery hidden behind the beauty.

NO EASY ROAD TO TRAVEL

We have our backpacks ready for our first challenge of the day—locate Gabrielle. We are told he and his mother are staying with his aunt in the rugged valley that lies far below the village of Cusmapa. Our mode of transportation will be a four-wheel drive truck and then by foot. We are ready... or so I thought.

As we begin our journey, the sky is clear and the air is fresh, much cooler than Managua.



This should be easy. We begin our quest down the steep rocky road. After nearly 30 minutes we realize we have gone as far as our trusty four-wheel drive truck can go. The remainder

of the trip will be on foot. The cool, fresh air has quickly disappeared. The sun is intense. Sweat begins to roll down our faces as we climb up and down the steep, rocky path, farther into the hills, climbing under barbed-wire fences and over large boulders. I suddenly realize this was not an easy trip as I had thought earlier this morning. Would we ever find Gabrielle?

Forty-five minutes later we see a small clearing on the hillside with a tiny home made of mud and sticks. Sitting on tree branches cut from the forest is a woman holding a young boy. We have successfully reached our destination.

A FIVE-YEAR-OLD IN A TINY BODY

How could this child we see be Gabrielle, the boy who is turning five in three days? He looks like my friend's 18-month-old child. He is wearing a heavy sweater, ragged and dirty. His face has scabs and scars. His legs are smaller than the branches beneath him. His stomach is swollen, his ribs protruding, face puffy, and the look in his eyes is distant. His head is not filled with beautiful, dark silky hair as most children in this country. Instead there are areas where no hair is growing and sores are easily visible. Will this child survive?

The vice mayor of Cusmapa and an official from the government has traveled with us, giving



us permission to take Gabrielle back to Cusmapa to provide food and medical care. Gabrielle's mother, who we've been told suffers from mental illness, gives us a quart-size plastic bag with a few pieces of ragged clothes. These are all of Gabrielle's possessions.

She shows no emotion. Gabrielle shows no emotion. Once again we see the results of severe malnutrition. It is heartbreaking.

Mike Zelek, a volunteer with La Familia Padre Fabretto gently picks up Gabrielle and we begin our journey back up the rough path to the top of the mountain. I remember how difficult it was to get to this remote place in the valley. I now wonder how we will ever be able to climb back up those steep rocky paths, often climbing under barbed-wire fences. We now have a small child to carry.

Within the hour we successfully reach our truck and are heading back to town. Gabrielle still shows no signs of emotion, no



crying, seeming to trust the strangers surrounding him. Silently we climb higher and higher to the top of the mountain.

A HUNGRY LITTLE BOY

We arrive in Cusmapa and quickly take Gabrielle to the table at the Center where a large bowl of soup made with rice, chicken, and tortilla is waiting. He does not know how to use the spoon. Peter Schaller, the Director of La Familia Padre Fabretto, carefully fills the spoon and begins to feed Gabrielle, trying to encourage him and help him understand that this will taste good, will nourish him. We know getting food into his swollen stomach is much more important than his using the proper utensil, and we are very relieved as Gabrielle reaches his small hand into the bowl and begins eating his way. Very slowly, one tiny handful at a time, dipping and dipping and dipping.

We sit quietly watching this malnourished boy eating and we wonder at his fate. Before we leave, we make arrangements for Gabrielle's housing, medical care, and nutritional needs until his condition is stable—the first step in saving Gabrielle.

VISITING CARLOS: ANOTHER SICK LITTLE BOY

by Charlene Meyer

We begin our trip to visit Carlos, traveling from Matagalpa to Cusmapa, a grueling six-hour-drive. I have not been able to erase the images of Carlos, the 6-year-old boy we met nearly one year ago, who received his second surgery just weeks ago, thanks to our Tin Roof donors. He was born with a birth defect called hypospadias, which is the absence or misplacement of a urinary opening.

This malformation should be corrected during the first months of a child's life, but in Carlos' case it was not. We were told the first surgery was performed when he was 2 or 3 years old, but it was not successful. As a result, Carlos has developed nephritic syndrome, a disorder in which the kidneys are damaged, causing them to leak large amounts of protein from the blood into the urine. We've funded a second surgery to begin the process of correcting this problem. My first stop will be in Somoto to check on his condition. I am hoping to find him feeling much better.

As we approach his home, a small concrete block house with a tin roof next to a dusty, dirt road, I rush ahead of the others. I cannot wait!

With my first glimpse of Carlos sitting in his little chair in his home, I am alarmed.

Something is very wrong. His face is fiery red, as are his arms and hands. As I give him a hug, I feel the heat radiating from his small body. He is listless, in pain, and is having difficulty concentrating. After talking with his mother and the doctor traveling with us, we make the decision to put Carlos in the truck with us and take him to the hospital immediately.



My heart is broken. I had hoped he would be well into the recuperation time from his surgery. Instead I see a child burning with fever. Within hours we are given his diagnosis—dengue fever.

I find out later that currently there is no vaccine or specific medication available to prevent or treat dengue fever. It is caused by one of four different, but related, viruses and is spread by the bite of mosquitoes that are naturally present in the region. Dengue fever begins with a sudden high fever, often as high as 104–105 degrees. Its victims are very uncomfortable with severe aches and pains.

We leave Carlos in the care of the doctors at the Somoto hospital. I check on him daily after we leave him. Thanks to the good care he received, they tell me that the dengue fever has run its course and he is recovering.

I wonder how much this child can endure? Why are these innocent Nicaraguan children given so many hardships? These are the questions I ask myself day after day.

I may not be able to answer the questions, but I do know that we can make a difference in the lives of many children. We have been witness to that fact. We also know we cannot stop as we look into the eyes of these beautiful dark-eyed children in this country we have grown to love. We are their hope.

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THERAPIST IN THE HOOD

by Romona Baker

Four-year-old Maria is not always happy as the therapist stretches and kneads, firmly uncurling her little clenched fist and encouraging her neck to hold up the loosely connected head.

Maria, who appears to have a condition like cerebral palsy, lives in the "hood" in Matagalpa, a tough area of tiny block homes, barbed-wire hedges, filth, hunger, and, of course, crime.

Two or three years ago, Maria would have been hidden in a back room by her family. But Maria is lucky. Her aunt, with whom she lives, adores her and believes in modern therapy enough to request help with her tiny niece.

Her therapist, Arnau Balcells, is a volunteer from Families Especiales, Sister Becky's center for special children. The Tin Roof Foundation helps fund Sister Becky's center because we know the power of love to transform Maria and the "hood," one child, one family at a time.



SAT: NEW SOLUTIONS FOR NICARAGUA'S CHRONIC PROBLEMS

by Peter Schaller

Sadly, the success rate of social investments in Nicaragua over the past 20 years has been very low. Despite huge investments by private foundations, international agencies, and the Nicaraguan government, poverty rates have increased. This frustrating reality has many roots and has caused many organizations to simply throw in the towel and move on to Africa, Asia, or some other country where there is also hunger and suffering. Generally speaking, most of the failure in development projects is due to poorly designed projects based on solutions that are imposed by the implementing agencies, with little or no participation by the communities and the people who will ultimately “benefit” from the project.

Today there is a different kind of program in Nicaragua, and it is transforming lives. It is called “SAT,” or Rural Tutorial Learning System in English, and is based on the inclusion of community members in the planning process to analyze new ways of solving chronic problems and then to go solve them. It empowers people to believe that within their community they possess the tools necessary to construct a new future and that success is possible.

SAT, implemented four years ago in Nicaragua, is a rural secondary program intended for communities where there is virtually no access to secondary education. A few years ago we were faced with a dilemma. After working diligently for several years to improve enrollment and permanence in the public school system in many rural communities, we discovered that there were more and more students finishing primary school every year, though opportunities to continue their education were nonexistent.

A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE

The good thing was that education had become an important element in many communities in the mountains where only a generation earlier, fewer than half of the children made it



past the third grade. Because of the harsh conditions in the isolated communities in northern Nicaragua, most children were removed from school in order to collect firewood, help with subsistence agricultural activities, or even to migrate to other regions or countries to help support their families. Only a few fortunate young people were able to relocate to more urbanized areas where they could continue their education. Even so, if they managed to continue their studies, there

were no opportunities for them if they were to return to their home communities.

While analyzing this problem with community members, we learned that the SAT program was boasting impressive success rates in countries like Colombia and Honduras. One of the most important factors was that SAT has a very flexible curriculum that can be modified and adapted to the specific conditions and needs of each community. The communities with which we discussed this program with were enthusiastic about the possibility of their children continuing their education without having to abandon their families and their communities. We decided to pilot the program with 150 students in 2007, and as we enter our fourth year, we (students, parents, community leaders, and staff) are convinced that SAT has been one of the most successful and innovative rural development programs that has been tested in Nicaragua.

THE FIRST HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

The SAT curriculum has been formally approved by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, which means that, upon completion of the six-year program, students will receive a high school diploma. The contents of the program, however, differ substantially from the traditional, public high school curriculum. To begin with, students don't have to leave their communities to seek out their education; their education is offered in their communities. SAT tutors travel to the communities and often live in the communities so that they are accessible to students and parents. They receive special training each year in order to effectively employ the methodologies of the program and to make necessary modifications for the community. Each SAT tutor participates

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WHY GIVE TO THE TIN ROOF FOUNDATION?

- 100% of your gift goes directly to the project
- No salaries (all volunteers, all the time)
- No administrative costs paid from your donation

Note: We will never share your name or information with any other organization.

SAT: SOLUTIONS

in three, week-long training sessions each year.

Classes can be held in any available structure, and the SAT classroom also extends to the furthest reaches of the community. Along with the academic class work, the SAT curriculum is designed to teach students about community development, leadership, personal values, sustainable agriculture, and the rational use of the natural resources available in their communities. After learning about these things in their textbooks, students go out into their communities to put their learning into practice. Their community activities could include public health campaigns, reforestation efforts, experimenting with new crops, or raising chickens.

JOB 1: IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITY

One of the most important elements of the SAT program is the identification of new economic opportunities in rural communities. Although we work in areas where the climate and geography are harsh and have limited economic development for generations, SAT students are learning to gen-

erate new solutions to chronic problems. This will not only help to reduce poverty levels over time; it will also decrease migration and the plethora of social problems that poverty creates.

Above all else, after implementing SAT for three years, we have begun to see a transformation of attitudes. In impoverished communities there is often a sense of resignation that stunts development.

People have no way of imagining a different life, and they are resigned to the fact that they live in poverty, their children will live in poverty, and the cycles continue. Through SAT's empowering curriculum, students, parents, and community

members are beginning to believe that change is possible. SAT students are transforming their communities, introducing new ideas, and motivating their communities into action. SAT is change!



**THEIR HUNGER IS REAL.
THE SOLUTION DEPENDS ON YOU.**



**Help Us
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