

REPORT FROM THE FIELD

PEACEWORKS 2019 DELEGATION TO NICARAGUA

January 14-28th, 2019

This delegation to Nicaragua was not like the others.

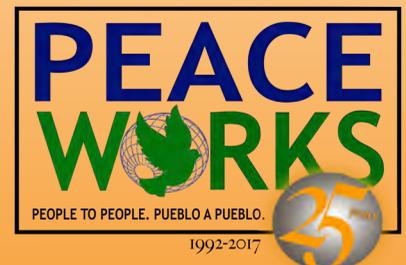
We were all a little nervous because of the political violence that has swept through Nicaragua and the ongoing incidents of repression we've all read about this past year. In the end, we had nothing to worry about as far as our safety. In fact, we were stopped fewer times than in previous years. But that doesn't mean there isn't political tension, and in many cases danger, that persists for our Nicaraguan partners.

During our trip we heard stories of censorship and fear, but we also witnessed some of the logistical difficulties caused by political turmoil. For example, our goal was to distribute \$70,400 to our Nicaraguan partners. At first everything was going along as usual, but near the end of our delegation it was announced that banks were no longer accepting checks from the U.S. Tierra, the organization that runs the Chispa de Vida pro-program for kids with disabilities, would be unable to cash our \$6000 donation. We believe this to be

a reaction to the U.S. Nica Act, which was signed into law in December and imposed sanctions on Nicaraguan leaders. The good news is that we found an alternative route to get the desperately needed funds to the children's program, and met our goal for delivering the support provided by the PeaceWorks community.

In light of recent obstacles, we are more inspired than ever by what our partners have been able to achieve. As well, our partners were touched and inspired that the PeaceWorks community has not forgotten them and continues to support their efforts.

In peace and solidarity,
Diane Sterner, 2019 Delegation Leader



1125 Woolley Ave., Union, NJ 07083
peaceworks.org

*The type of greeting you'd get most anywhere in Nicaragua --
children in Managua's Eastern Market*



Chispa de Vida Center for Kids with Disabilities
& the Mariposa Spanish School

Nicaragua is beautiful!

by Frank Cincotta



La Mariposa language school provides Spanish lessons and eco-lodging for tourists on its beautiful nature preserve in San Juan de La Concepcion and invests its profits in social programs in the community. *La Mariposa's* hallways, which usually bustle with Spanish language students from around the world, seemed eerily quiet even though Mariposa Director, Paulette, believes it is safe for tourists to return. Yet, in spite of the school taking a devastating financial hit, the silence was only momentary.

All of a sudden we were greeted by dozens of smiling faces -- a parade of joy. Children from *La Mariposa's* programs put on a magnificent show of Nicaraguan dance and culture. It was part of a morning we'll never forget.

Peaceworks funding is dedicated to the school's *Chispa de Vida* (Spark of Life) Center for Disabled Children. In addition to funds, PeaceWorks shipments have provided crutches, wheel chairs, and various therapy equipment. In the past year, two small buildings have been completed at the center, one for physical therapy and one for special education, serving 39 children and eight adults. There are now two physical therapists at the center and the children come with family members who then learn how to administer therapy at home. As a result, the therapy becomes community based. In addition, the center provides

hydro therapy in a pool off site, and equine therapy with 16 rescue horses. All these services are provided by *Chispa de Vida* free of charge to families who could not afford to go elsewhere.

Our visit ended with a short talk and performance by a disabled 22-year-old man. Four years ago, as a result of a motorcycle accident, severe injuries left him unable to walk and speak. With the help received at the center, he has made remarkable progress. While still seriously impaired, he was able to tell us his story and even sing a short song while swaying to the music of *La Bamba*. The performance was truly inspiring.

Donation: \$6000



Axayacatl Women's Collective

Standing Up for Women in Uncertain Times

by Micha Loughlin

The Axayacatl Women's Collective, located in Masaya, has been at the physical heart of the political unrest that erupted last year. For months, a roadblock erected by anti-government protesters stood right outside their doorstep. Repercussions have been many and varied. The staff, who serve women fleeing from domestic violence, and their clients have been traumatized by the killings, torture, and rape of local activists and protesters.

When economic activity came to a standstill, *Axayacatl* forgave repayment of microloans that were outstanding to relieve stress on the borrowers. While they do not currently have the means to restart the loan program, their support for the women of Masaya continues, and they are finding new ways to help them achieve economic self sufficiency.

Axayacatl's agriculture program continues to help women build wealth by providing them with animals and seeds which they learn to grow, multiply and share with other women. A current emphasis is on building cisterns to store water for use in their homes and gardens. Additional forms of support they hope to provide with our help include fencing to protect crops and carts for hauling produce or products to market.

In 2015, our delegation stood with *Axayacatl's* director María Eugenia on an empty lot, as she dreamed out loud of building a women's center. The dream is now a reality, thanks to funding from PeaceWorks including donations raised by Brooks Smith and churches throughout Northern New Jersey.

Donation: \$7000

El Porvenir Coffee Co-op

by Micha Loughlin

El Porvenir Coffee Co-op sits atop a mountain with a gorgeous view -- a sunny, temperate paradise. But with limited resources and access to vital services, life in this remote paradise is challenging.



We visited the Jim Burchell Health Clinic that PeaceWorks helped build in this mountain community. Every three months, a Nicaraguan team of

medical professionals arrive and spend two days serving patients at the center -- 200 consultations in 2018. The batteries and inverters that PeaceWorks carried up last year to convert solar power continue to power the ultrasound equipment.

To improve their sustainability, *El Porvenir* is experimenting with drought-resistant coffee plant varieties. Hopefully, this will result in greater yields and higher prices. As money becomes available, they will continue replacing older plants with the varieties that prove most fruitful.

Donation: \$1750



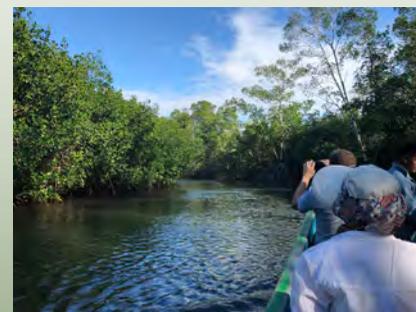
Doña Margarita in front of her new cistern with Axayacatl staffer, Maribel.

The Sea Turtle Sanctuary

by Frank Cincotta

Sea turtles that nest on the shores of Nicaragua are highly endangered. With the leadership of the *Palo de Oro* Sea Turtle Sanctuary, thirteen local families patrol the beaches at night, collecting eggs from nests and carefully delivering them to the turtle nursery at the sanctuary. The families get paid for the eggs, and the sanctuary preserves the eggs until the Olive Ridley, Leatherback and Hawksbill turtles are hatched and released in the Pacific.

This past year PeaceWorks was able to send \$2,000 in emergency funds in August, at the start of the turtle nesting season. The funds were of particular help to these families, who were severely affected by the decline in tourism resulting from recent political developments.



This year, the number of rescued eggs has exceeded 12,000. 7,000 have hatched to date!

Donation: \$1000

Inhijambia Program for Street Children

The Power of Persuasion

by Marilyn Devroye

Inhijambia routinely visits the darkest corners of Managua's Eastern Market. Its street educators identify neglected and abused children and offer them friendship and a safe place to go. In miserable, dirt-floor hovels we spotted donated goods from the PeaceWorks container shipments – here a bed, there an iron or a small tv – given to the families in exchange for their children's participation in the program. These extremely poor parents require their children to work and also need support. Convincing a reluctant parent to allow their child to participate in Inhijambia's education or health programs may take a year, sometimes more.

Like so much of Nicaragua, the political unrest has had a huge impact on Inhijambia. They were recently forced to close one of their two offices when anticipated funding fell through. That's what made handing over a \$20,000 check all that more special – the group erupted in cheers. Among other needs, this timely infusion of cash will let them reopen the closed office just in time for the start of the new school year.

Donation \$20,000



Working street kids, Eastern Market, Managua

FEDICAMP

Resilience in Times of Change

by Guy Talbot

The Association for the Development of Rural Farmers, FEDICAMP, is focused on training families to develop organic, sustainable farms and gardens, promoting reforestation, water harvesting techniques and other ways of dealing with the effects of climate change.

Day two of our time with FEDICAMP was spent with the community of Santa Teresa. A new community for FEDICAMP, Santa Teresa launched a 3-month pilot project to start 10 families on a program of community based, sustainable farming. During our visit, sever-

al families proudly showed us herb gardens of oregano, basil, and mint; plots of vegetables with potatoes, tomatoes, lettuce, onions and pipian, and small orchards of avocado, coconuts, starfruit, mandarins and limes. Soon, a total of 24 families will be participating in the project.

The following day the delegation visited Rodeo Grande, a remote community surrounded by pine forests in the mountains overlooking Estelí. The community maintains a seed bank, where seeds from successful crops are set aside, cured with ash or garlic, and stored so they can be used for future plantings. Rainfall is captured and measured on a daily basis, with monthly reports collated and compared against fore-

casts so that farmers can decide to delay planting in dry years and accelerate when the rains are forecast earlier.

No doubt, the economic situation in the country makes things hard, and is starting to make some international funders skittish. But campesinos organizing makes for resilient communities working together to face the challenges ahead.

Donation: \$26,400

Other Donations:

PeaceWorks also donated \$5000 to the Cusmapa Pineweaving Co-op to help fix members' houses, as well as \$2000 to the Jubilee House to support their programs.

PeaceWorks' Diane Sterner and Marilyn Devroye with FEDICAMP promoter in Rodeo Grande

