

Newsletter • Spring 2020

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Strengthening human and community development since 1984, through the exchange of people and ideas between Minnesota and León, Nicaragua.

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EXPLORATORY TOUR GROUP TRAVELS TO NICARAGUA

Five PML supporters took an exploratory trip to León from Jan. 29 to Feb. 8, 2020. An important goal was to assess the situation for bringing travel groups and a U.S. trip coordinator to León in the next few months.

We met with past board members and friends, including some that had been involved since the 1980s, and spoke with staff and leaders of several other NGOs in León and Chacraseca.

The situation seems to be stable in León. We did not see any military presence on the streets, and tourists are returning. Based on the counsel we received and our own perceptions, we feel very confident in proceeding with our two planned trips for this July (Youth Cultural Exchange) and August (hosted by Ralph Baumgartner and Kristie Hennig).

However, we will wait until after the Nicaraguan election in 2021 to hire a new Minnesota trip coordinator because of concerns about potential unrest during

the months leading up to and immediately after the elections.

In León we took a walking tour of several cathedrals, visited the lovely botanical gardens and art museum, and spent two days with the San Carlos and La Gallina communities. We met Rosa's new intern, **Gabriela**, and the parents who will be hosting the YCE group in July, who hosted us for a pleasant evening of dinner and conversation. Time at the beach and a tour of the mangroves at Isla San Juan Venado rounded out our trip.

– *Deborah Allan*



The bridge in La Gallina rests on one support, and the other has come loose from the rock. During the wet season, the water can cover the bridge and part of the community is completely cut off from access to the road or school.



Sunset at Las Penitas Beach



Meeting with Project Opportunity staff



Board of Directors



Visiting the new water tank in San Carlos



Some of the youth

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Since the protests, turbulence and violence that began in Nicaragua in April, 2018, PML has not had groups go to León for safety reasons. At that time we pulled out our director, who is North American. At the same time, as an organization we have continued to support **Rosa Lira Ulloa** in her good work in community organizing and community development.

At the end of January a travel group of PML veterans led by **Deborah Allan** traveled to Nicaragua to assess conditions on the ground. Our contacts there, including Rosa, have assured us that it is safe to visit now. This group traveled to Nicaragua to see for themselves.

PML board member Kristie Hennig and I are putting together a travel group for August 11-21, 2020. Contact me if you're interested in joining us to get the flavor of what is happening in Nicaragua, as well as to see the great work that Rosa is doing.

In solidarity,

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ANNUAL PML FUNDRAISER A SUCCESS

On Saturday, October 26, approximately 120 PML supporters gathered at St. Albert the Great Church in south Minneapolis for a convivial evening and to hear an update of our activities in Nicaragua. The evening's highlight was a presentation by León-based project coordinator **Rosa Lira Ulloa**, acting director **Elizabeth Moreira**, and San Carlos youth leader and soccer team captain, 17-year-old **Helen Ovando**.

The event kicked off with dancing by Stephanie Owen's group **Salsa for Good**, while guests enjoyed drinks, mingling, and silent auction bidding. While the tamale dinner was served, Elizabeth and Rosa gave a summary of the past year and plans envisioned by San Carlos and surrounding communities. Helen gave a dynamic presentation about the positive difference the PML-underwritten purchase of an athletic field has made for not just the youth but the whole community of San Carlos. The evening was capped with a live auction to replenish the PML account. Thanks to generous donations, the evening netted \$16,272 for PML. A heartfelt "Thank You!" to all who volunteered, attended, and/or donated.

– *Doreen Kloehn*



COMMUNITY UPDATES

La Gallina

The biggest success in 2019 has been to organize into small groups and participate in the cycle of community action. In the past, residents of La Gallina never knew what their government representatives were doing. Now residents advocate and demand to be in the loop regarding actions to improve community.

San Carlos Recreation Area

Immediately following the purchase of property for a recreation area, volunteers of all ages came out to prepare the land for sports. There was a mound of dirt along one side of the field that was previously built up for drainage. Residents managed to manually level the land, and the whole community helped cut down a tree and clean up weeds. Now teams that use the field rotate maintenance responsibilities. Men play baseball almost daily. Yader, the girls' soccer coach, is also on the men's baseball team and serves as liaison for both teams.

At small group meetings, OMEGAS – the Joint Action Committee representatives – shared important information about the use of the land and everyone had a chance to give input. It was stressed that although it is considered community property, the land was purchased for a specific purpose. The Water and Sanitation Committee (CAPS, in Spanish) – because it is already registered as a legal entity – is the legal representative, so they can administer its use. For example, if someone wants to put cows to graze on the field, CAPS has the authority to say no and explain the use is for recreation.

The field has been a great motivator for many young mothers to get out of the house. Some residents had concerns that only the girls' soccer team could use it, but that was cleared up.

Doña Alejandra initiated a women's kickball team. So many women wanted to play that three communities (San Carlos, La Gallina and neighboring Country) formed three solid teams. A donation of six adult kickballs sent from the U.S. confounded the team members. Having only played with soccer balls, the women weren't familiar with the textured rubber balls and were afraid to kick them because the balls felt so soft. Despite the concern, the balls are being tested and perhaps PML will be supplying more in the future.

A commission of mostly teens is being formed to control the calendar in order to avoid multiple games overlapping. Residents overwhelmingly agreed that the project is a great thing for the community.



Clean water continues to flow in San Carlos

Members of the Water Committee (CAPS) and OMEGAS – the Joint Action Committee representatives – attended all the small group meetings last fall in order to give updates. This included an explanation of the need to moderately increase fee water fees in 2020 for households that use more than 7 meters a month. Residents learned that through good care and maintenance, the community will benefit in the future and have a cushion of savings to deal with possible unforeseen problems. At the year-end celebration, the CAPS reported to the community that there is a 100% fee collection – a fantastic achievement! As always, good communication is key to attaining consensus.

Joint Concerns about Medical Attention

Because both San Carlos and La Gallina are served by the same health clinic, they advocate jointly for improved health care. By the end of 2019, the doctor assigned to the clinic was showing up 2-3 days per week. It's not ideal, but at least it's consistent. Some residents said the doctor has an improved attitude. Others remain dissatisfied. All small groups evaluated the situation. As a result, OMEGAS – the Joint Action Committee representatives – plan talk to the Ministry of Health (MINSA) about advances and problems. The objective is to explain what the area needs, not receive only what MINSA decides what to provide. In particular, the mobile clinic experience has been unsatisfactory. The unit, equipped with equipment for routine exams like pap smears and blood pressure checks, would arrive late or stay only half hour. Another ongoing concern is the need for a permanent doctor to serve the clinic.

FAREWELL TO LILLIAM

PML congratulates **Lilliam** and her family as they prepare to welcome another member! Unfortunately, due to delicate health concerns and other family circumstances, Lilliam has decided to not continue as intern under Rosa in the communities. We wish her well, as the PML board of directors works with Rosa to fill the position.



YEAR-END FINANCIAL RECAP

Although we have not had U.S. staff in Nicaragua since July 2018, **Rosa** has continued to work her magic as an effective community organizer with the San Carlos community and also now in La Gallina. More than 150 supporters in Minnesota made donations throughout the year at two successful fundraising events, and we received \$10,000 from the Rotary Club of Lake Minnetonka/Excelsior.

We worked hard to shave expenses in Minnesota to just over \$13,000, including part-time pay for our acting director, **Elizabeth Moreira**. Our Minnesota costs are only 19% of total expenditures, while 65% goes directly to support Rosa and the community work.

2019

- Total income: \$73,320
- Total expenses: \$72,205

– submitted by *Deborah Allan, Treasurer*



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