



Project Minnesota/León

a people to people sister state program with León, Nicaragua

Summer 2013 Newsletter

Projects Update

Meredith Wardlaw, PML On-Site Coordinator

Another project season has begun for PML! We're pleased to be collaborating again with two former PML communities, Carlos Nuñez and San Carlos, and we're working in a new neighborhood, Oscar Turcios. The projects are varied, from a playground to a preschool bathroom, but these projects are what the community leaders have identified as necessary for the growth and prosperity of the area.

Don Martin, the community leader we worked with to build *Gotitas de Esperanza*, approached PML to ask if it would be possible to enclose the property around *Gotitas* so the preschool could more fully utilize its outdoor space. PML collaborated with Project Opportunity (another small non-profit) to build a fence around the property so teachers can plant a garden, let the students play freely, and not worry about strangers coming onto the property.



Don Mario, the tireless community member who worked with PML to build the rural health clinic in San Carlos, proposed building a playground for the visiting children. San Carlos doesn't have recreation space for kids, even at the local school, and Don Mario explained that mothers often bring their children for check-ups or as tag-alongs during their own visits. He would also like for the clinic to be a place of enjoyment for families.

And last but not least, the community of Oscar Turcios reached out to PML and we had a chance to meet the staff and parents at *Dulce Sonrisa*, a small preschool located behind the municipal slaughterhouse. The neighborhood is in a rather forgotten corner of León, and doesn't have access to garbage services or other city benefits. The local preschool only had a small latrine to serve the teachers and children from one to six years old. The families of *Dulce Sonrisa* brought a proposal to build a bathroom adjacent to the center, with two toilets, a shower, and sink. Project Minnesota-León was impressed by their dedication and organization, and now the students have access to hygienic facilities.

Project Minnesota-León continues to support *Taller Artístico Xuchialt*, which many visitors to León remember as the dynamic youth arts organization geared toward low-income students. They provide funding for scholarships, teacher training, materials and field trips. *Xuchialt* continues to grow and prosper, and supports us in return by hosting our delegations for art and dance classes.

2013 Delegations

Kara Beckman, PML Northern Board

The 2013 delegation season marks a couple of firsts for PML. We have our first 2 "open" delegations in several years. In late June, a family delegation with young people ages 11, 13 and 15 will spend time learning about living with families in other cultures and what it's like to be a young person in León.

Following that group, in mid-July, the Augsburg seminar offered through the Physician's Assistant and Master of Arts in Leadership programs will arrive, with a focus on health care in Nicaragua. Our relationship with HEODRA, the hospital in León, as well as with public and private clinics and pharmacies, allow Augsburg delegates to get a full sense of the health care delivery system in Nicaragua.

Finally, in mid-August, a group of moms who first experienced Nicaragua through their teenage children's participation in the Youth Cultural Exchange (YCE) program of the First Universalist Church will have their turn at meeting the families who hosted their children (now mostly off in college!) These women will be spending time with their host families, discussing parenting dreams and challenges, as well as visiting PML projects. A few of their youth will be returning to León as well, to volunteer while their moms have a full delegation experience. Planning is already underway for 2014! If you are interested in learning more about delegations, please contact me at beckm118@gmail.com

¡Qué Viva León!

Saturday, November 2nd, 2013



Fiesta fundraiser for Project Minnesota/León's work in Nicaragua

Keynote Speaker:

Secretary of State Mark Ritchie

"Connecting Minnesota to the World;

Sister Cities and Beyond"

- Extended social hour with mojitos, cerveza, vino y limonada
- Acoustic guitar and vocals of Latin American favorites
- Primitivista painting for the kids
- Latin fusion dinner by Jeannie Inglehart

Church of St. Albert the Great

2836 33rd Ave S. Minneapolis, MN 55406

Finances

Mike Troutman, PML Northern Board/Treasurer

Many thanks to everyone who has supported PML financially. You are making possible a growing partnership between Minnesota and Nicaragua, a partnership based on mutual respect and solidarity. Despite our modest size, PML offers cultural and educational exchange opportunities that have transformed the perspectives of Minnesotans and Nicaraguans alike. In addition, PML-supported projects in education, health services and the arts have a meaningful impact in the lives of neighborhoods and communities in the department of León, Nicaragua.

Your financial gifts are essential to continuing this important work. From the PML Fiesta and bike rides, to the annual fundraising appeal, your generosity makes a vital difference. We invite you to consider a special summer gift to PML, which can help bridge the gap until our traditional fundraising time later in the year. To make a donation go to: http://www.mn-leon.org/donate_now.aspx Or you can send a check to: PML, 2315 Chicago Ave, Minneapolis, MN 55404.

You can make an even bigger impact by becoming a monthly sustainer of PML's work through monthly deductions from your credit card, or directly from your bank account. Please contact Mike Troutman to find out how you can join PML's existing sustainers: miketrounman@gmail.com

PML Newsletter Via Email & Online

Janeen McAllister, PML Northern Board

As promised, this issue of the newsletter is being sent via email only, and is posted on our website, www.mn-leon.com. This action will save PML money and volunteer energy, leaving more of both for PML activities and projects! We will be sending the Fiesta invitation and distribute our year-end letter and funds appeal via snailmail.

If you did not get a copy in your email inbox, please send your email address to:

jemcall@comcast.net

Muchas gracias!

Comings and Goings

- We welcomed Bernabe back to the Southern Board earlier this year after an extended leave to assist family in Costa Rica. We also extend our sympathies to him in the recent death of his father.
- Our on-site coordinator from 2010-2012, Sarah Shelton, is off to graduate school in August. She will be pursuing her MBA at the University of Iowa – *buena suerte Sarah!*

February Visit to León

Kara Beckman & Deborah Allan, PML Northern Board

In early February we spent two days in León, attending the monthly Board meeting in-person with the Southern Board, and visiting with our partners for three projects.

We visited with Project Opportunity coordinators Deborah and Kate. Both of our recent preschool projects, *Gotitas* and *Dulce Sonrisa*, came to us via contacts with this other non-profit in León. Their staff member David Aguilera has been very effective in helping communities think through their projects and elaborate their proposals to meet our guidelines.

At *Gotitas de Esperanza*, in the community of Carlos Nuñez, we met with Don Martin. He thanked PML for our support, noted how wonderful our coordinators are to work with, and gave an eloquent testimony to the power of delegations (St Luke Presbyterian of Minnetonka was hosted in Carlos Nuñez last summer).

We also met with Raquel from *Dulce Sonrisa*, accompanied by a parent volunteer and the nutritionist for the preschool. When we met, the project was still in the final approval stage, but it's now been finished! Raquel is a wonderful teacher who does amazing work with limited resources. They were all very appreciative of PML's support.

It was incredibly helpful to attend a board meeting in-person in León. We talked at length about issues that are difficult to tackle during translated Skype calls. We agreed to a preliminary project approval process that should be more timely, transparent and supportive for our partners. We also continued to engage regarding differences in the understanding and practice of budgeting - a role not always given to Boards of Directors in Nicaragua. Finally, we held preliminary discussions about agenda items for our upcoming joint summit (*cumbre*) in León in August (see next article).

Face-to-face meeting time for board members is hugely important to building our organizational capacity to work cross-culturally. We were both honored to spend time with our colleagues in Nicaragua and look forward to being with them again soon.

Upcoming *Cumbre*

Keith Olstad, PML Northern Board

In late August all members of the PML Board, North & South, will meet face-to-face for a week in León. We call this gathering a summit or *cumbre*. and our last one was in November 2010 in Minnesota. A *cumbre* gives us a crucial opportunity to evaluate our performance as an organization over the previous two years, to address challenges and weaknesses, to elect our leadership in various roles for the coming two years, and to do some strategic planning. We will also take the time to meet the community leaders and see first-hand some of the projects which PML has funded. The Southern Board members will host the Northern members in their homes, just as we did for them in 2011. So that experience, and the long days of meetings, provide the opportunity for developing relationships and friendships – an important component of our 'people-to-people' organization!