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Somos Ohana Nicaragua Newsletter

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Students with their parents at Instituto Augusto C. Sandino after receiving their bikes from Somos Ohana Nicaragua donors. This group was special because they were able to meet in person the 2 volunteer youngsters (Rhys and Jonathan from the US) who labored to purchase these bikes through fundraisers and chores at home! Since 2009, donors have made it possible to buy bikes for approximately 12 youngsters per year who would otherwise have to walk 1-2 hours to get to regional secondary schools. Mil gracias, dear friends!

Dear Family & Friends,

Our hearts and minds are filled with gratitude to you for these many years of faithful walking with us as we share love, talents, and resources with our brothers and sisters in Nicaragua. In return, they have had many opportunities to show their appreciation especially by participating in community health and educational development, and in their trusting kindness to our volunteers and ourselves.

The recent hurricanes affecting the U.S. Atlantic Coast & Caribbean nations remind us that it was Hurricane Mitch (1998) that devastated the northwest region of an already poor nation struggling for development that ignited our desire to help. After 18 years of collaboration, our message to others in similar circumstances is: like the Nicaraguans, have faith and hope, and use these opportunities to work together to create a new and better life, one day at a time.

With deep Aloha and profound gratitude, *Charlotte & Dan*



Everybody Loves Day Camp!

A few days before we returned to Villanueva, we received word that the Finca we had grown accustomed to would not be available for groups anymore. What could have been overwhelming was not, because immediately we received permission from the Brigadistas, a volunteer health organization, to use their auditorium. That gave us adequate space for all the activities, with the exception of a swimming pool. The added advantage was that it had a large kitchen where Juanita Pineda, (who is the chef, head, and heart of meal production) would not have to pack and serve meals outside the convenience of the kitchen/dining room!

Besides the new environment, there were other changes in the program; like: starting the day with reading to whomever is present while the volunteer staff waited for all to arrive. That proved exciting (depending on how engaging the stories and pictures were!) A great way to start the day! Even the mothers were alert! We spent more time helping children, who had never entered a conventional school because of their different abilities, learn how to write their names, put together puzzles, counting with an abacus, and coloring pictures of common animals while talking about the animals. One group worked with their parents to build a “pesebre”, a cardboard and straw shelter to house the figurines of the First Christmas Family.

We did not lack for music either, as various groups of musicians accompanied us during the two weeks. To top off the last day, we even initiated a parade of participants around the town square, complete with a youthful marching band! Everyone voted to do that again next year!

Instead of participating in the regular activities, the group of 12 teenagers who are deaf, (and who receive instructions in sign language at several secondary schools), were driven by van to the Instituto Augusto C.



Sandino in La Carreta. There they received their first-ever instruction in basic computer usage, giving their full attention for 3 hours/day for 2 days. It is a beginning. Profesor Miguel Angel Castillo (instructor) and Profesora Josefa de la Cruz (the sign language interpreter) were as delighted as the students! Being computer savvy is a definite asset in preparation for jobs in developing industries in Nicaragua. As the government puts more effort into making their curriculum more inclusive for students with learning challenges, continuing computer classes is a necessity.



New Hope for the Municipality of Villanueva

In August, Roddyverth Betanco, a native of Villanueva, and scholarship student of Somos Ohana Nicaragua, received his licentiate in Physical Therapy at the National University of Nicaragua in Managua! It was a pleasure to announce this to the people of Villanueva, because this population (approximately 34,000 people) has never had a resident physical therapist.

Since 1979, when free medical care became available in many villages of the Municipality, people with motor disabilities still had to travel by bus, horse, or private taxi service to get to Chinandega, Leon, or Managua for physical therapy. Poor economic conditions, and long distances to the cities, impeded their utilization of therapeutic services. Many made sacrifices to get to their first or second appointments, then stopped going. For lack of follow-up, they never regained optimal rehabilitation. The opportunity to obtain physical therapy in their own village, or their own homes, will be a great blessing, and motivator to do everything possible to regain their health and abilities.

While he waits for a position to be created for him in the local Ministry of Health, he is volunteering for a few families, and working part time for a private therapeutic company in Leon. We wish you blessings for a productive future, Roddyverth!



Solidarity & Hope Among the Cancer Patients of Villanueva

Each year we host a family dinner with persons who are receiving treatments for cancer, or have been in the past. Besides the meal, and the donation to a Travel Fund that enables them to get to their treatment centers in Managua, Leon, or Chinandega, this opportunity for support offers newcomers the experience of learning that they are not alone in their journey toward health, and of learning some of the strategies that have worked for others. It allows each

one to tell their story, and to be among others who have walked similar paths.

At dinner this year, the group received a new member of the “ohana”, Dora Rojas, who spoke to the group as a fellow cancer patient. “We who are receiving chemotherapy, we who know the journey, must not give up, no matter how difficult some days may be, because our families and communities need us,” was her message. Someone else might not have received the attention that Dora did. Every adult in the room knows Dora. She has been a vocal and trusted leader since the early years of the Sandinista Revolution. She has been active in local, basic community initiatives, seeking ways, programs, and funds to improve the status of women, and the health and education of all members of the family. After being elected Vice-Mayor of Villanueva, it seemed natural for her to accept the responsibilities of “Diputada”, (deputy/representative) of her home municipality in the National Assembly in Managua. She continues her mission even through the chemo treatments. We love you, Dora; **Salud!**

The Joy of Reading Opens the Universe through books!

“ . . . reading not only increases mental capabilities, but also helps fine-tune motor skills in children by turning pages and stimulating the brain.” (DustiB in the Pen & the Pad). Thanks to generous donors, we delivered a few more than 100 books this year to 5 primary schools, 3 pre-schools, and 2 secondary schools. What we cannot see in our daily world becomes visible in our minds through words and illustrations/photos in books. *The delight is obvious in Teacher Jenny’s pre-school class & friends in Canafistola.*



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Somos Ohana Nicaragua is an all volunteer organization called to cooperate with groups or individuals seeking to improve their lives. If you would like to become involved as a volunteer, please write, call or send an e-mail.

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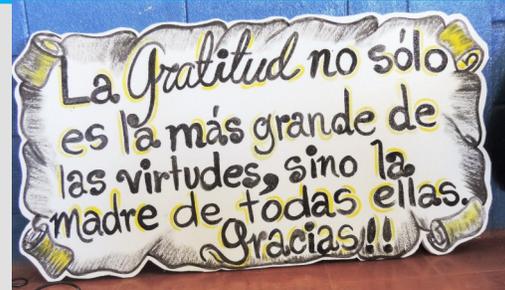
All donations are tax deductible

News in Brief, Instituto Augusto C. Sandino, in La Carreta:

Improving the Electrical System: 4 more wood posts and stronger cable was installed, connecting to the electric company's power transformer on the street. The system is under MinEd's supervision.

Daily Attendance vs. Weekly Attendance: When the new secondary school opened in 2016, a daily curriculum was established to improve the opportunity for students' learning. Some families in isolated villages still send their youngsters only to weekly classes. Reasons cited: risks of physical harm (esp. of girls, even when bikes are offered), and lack of family funds to pay for daily student lunches (daily cost: = 65 cents). Two possible solutions are being tested: a) Students would travel in groups of 3; and b) All students would plant a vegetable garden that they can harvest, thereby benefiting from improved nutrition. This last suggestion was implemented in August, and students are already consuming the fruits of their labors! (See photos below.)

Update on Water Availability: Having dependable rains between May & December has alleviated the school's needs for water for basic hygiene, cleaning of classrooms & bathrooms, and watering the gardens. Utilizing large barrels for water catchment serve this purpose. We are still counting on our commitment with Amigos for Christ to drill a deep well to establish a dependable system even during times of drought. Unfortunately, the plan was delayed due to major repairs of the drill, and turbulent weather on the Atlantic Coast delayed shipment of the rig from GA. With God's help, this dream will become reality in 2018. Gracias to all our donors, for your generous, faithful support to help this happen, soon!



"Gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues, but also the mother of all. Thank You!" (Students, 2017)



Photos: left to Right

- 1) Students preparing the garden with faculty & some parents;
- 2) Cooking squash stew outdoors.
- 3) Preparing to eat their first harvest!

**Eat Pizza at Flatbread Co. 1/23/18,
& Help Equip a Kitchen for Students in La Carreta**