



Celebrating 25 Years of Struggle for Social Justice!

New Haven/León Sister City Project

Summer 2009 Newsletter

Dear Friends...

We're very proud that this year marks the 25th anniversary of the New Haven/León Sister City Project. Twenty five years ago, citizens from New Haven were inspired by the example of a people's revolution in Nicaragua, and committed themselves to lending a hand on the ground. We spread the word in the US, shedding light on the US-funded war against the revolutionary Sandinista government.

When the war defeated the revolution at the polls just six years after the NH/LSCP was founded, we kept working because our support was for the people on the ground.

Today the political contexts of the US and Nicaragua both look quite different. Teachers, students, farmers, laborers, and other citizens from both countries face new challenges. But the 25-year tradition of the NH/LSCP is to follow the lead of the grassroots, and that has not changed.

The good news that the people of Goyena finally have access to public secondary school education in their community is entirely fitting for this newsletter that also celebrates a quarter-century. Education that prioritizes critical thinking lies at the heart of grassroots leadership. Education that is valued and fought for by a community working together, all the better. To that end, we continue this work.

-NH/LSCP



Enyes Avendaño Trujillo, age 19, is one of the many young people from Goyena who have been able to continue their studies. Enyes also works at the community preschool, helping youngsters learn to love learning.

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The bell tower of the Cathedral of León

Finally! A Secondary School in Goyena

The Ministry of Education Responds to Community Demands

In recent newsletters, we've followed the struggle of leaders and young people in Goyena to pressure the Ministry of Education to bring a secondary school – the equivalent of junior high and high school – to Goyena. After three years of petitions and demands, they've finally got one, after a last-ditch effort on the cusp of the school year.

It's up and running now, the secondary school in Goyena. Young people come from nearby rural communities as well as from Goyena to pick up where they left off after sixth grade, some as many as eight years ago. A parents' committee has already formed, to advocate for the needs of the school, to not let up on the Ministry of Education for a moment. Classes meet every weekday afternoon, and the first year has the highest number of attendees, a steady thirty.

Still, community leaders know not everyone eligible to be studying is attending class, so they advertise the new school via "base radio" – a pickup truck and a megaphone.

Leading the push to get young people back in school is the president of the community

board of directors of Goyena sub-community Nueva Vida, Maria Eugenia Quiroz. "I have dreamed of a secondary school in this community," she says. "And it was difficult to achieve."

Just a few days before the start of the school year at the end of January, the Ministry of Education announced for the second year in a row that it wouldn't be able to support a secondary school in Goyena. Families in Goyena had already acquired books and materials, already allocated the space they would use for classes, and they weren't ready to let it go that easily this year.

Accompanied by Rene Vanegas of the NH/LSCP, community leaders and parents went to León and waited nearly all day in the office of the Ministry of Education, demanding to see

the minister herself.

The minister explained that the MinEd didn't have teachers ready for the school. When pressed for more information – why not? – she explained that actually, all the teachers were ready except the English teacher. They didn't have one.

The group brokered a negotiation between the NH/LSCP and the Ministry. The NHLSCP could provide an English teacher for now, until the Ministry finds one of its own. Two days later, classes began.

"It was a real success to see the effort of the parents," says Maria Eugenia Quiroz. "We were all able to see that we could achieve something by being united."

We'll keep you posted on the progress of the school and its students

Two of Goyena's promising young new students, Anabel and Luis

Here and There on \$25

In New Haven:

- \$25 gets you into MOMA (with \$5 left over)
- \$25 gets you to NYC and back (with a little left over)
- \$25 gets two into a movie (with a bag of popcorn)

In León:

\$60 is the monthly salary of a preschool teacher in the rural community of Goyena. It doesn't get her far.

The \$25 monthly supplement provided by the NH/LSCP helps get her family through the month.

**Think about what your gift means.
Think about what your gift can do.**

Thank you.



Notes from an Intern

Connecticut native and Cornell University student Zoe Black spent a month with the NH/LSCP in León last summer, where she accompanied education programs in Goyena. Here are some of her reflections on her experience.

I spent a month last summer working in Nicaragua. What initially sparked my interest was a trip I took there with a delegation from my former high school, Hopkins. My first experience in Nicaragua had a powerful impact on me and afterwards I had a pressing desire to go back. When I found the time and money, I did just that, wanting to fully immerse myself in the culture.

During my trip I worked in Goyena, a rural community outside of León, where The Sister City Project supports many programs. I spent many of my days in the pre-school and first grade classrooms, working with young students who are deprived of fundamental necessities for living a complete and healthy life. Despite the children's dire circumstances, their faces radiated hope, and they always wore big, charming smiles.

The energy these children had made me feel wanted and appreciated. I felt like a member of their family.

My trip was short, but made me aware of a world drastically unlike my own. I remember the children staring up at me with their big brown eyes, wondering where I came from and what my role was in their lives. I found that as I got closer to students, I wanted so desperately to give to them what I had been so fortunate to receive—an accessible education, available and affordable health care, and proper nutrition.

While in Nicaragua I initiated a dental health project, where I taught the students through illustration, song, and practice the importance of taking care of their gums and teeth. I worked with the teachers to integrate dental health into the curriculum.

In Goyena, I learned that sending supplies and money to a poor country can only do so much. Education is the most valuable tool we have, because adults and children can learn how to initiate programs within their own communities, ultimately making projects more sustainable.

Volunteers frequently visit countries like Nicaragua, but the trips are fleeting and many visitors only stay a matter of months. Without a sufficient system of education, progress will always be limited.

I want to continue to work with the community of Goyena to help begin sustainable projects that the community can carry out over the years. I am arranging to lead a delegation to Nicaragua in December 2009.

Below: The dental education program in progress. Zoe Black is pictured at right, and at right in the middle picture.



Follow Your Heart: Take Sides For Social Justice

Interns Needed:

Work in Nicaragua with our Education Program — support sustainable community development

Organize a Delegation to Nicaragua!

Volunteer in the New Haven office — great work, flexible schedule

Contact Chris Schweitzer at 203.562.1607, cschweitzer@newhavenleon.org

Grease and Spreadsheets:

A reflection by two long-term supporters in honor of the NH/LSCP's 25th anniversary.

by Shelly Altman and Susan Bramhall

Grease and spreadsheets. The elements of our 19 year affair with the NH/LSCP. Newcomers we are, having joined the family 6 years after its birth. He the bike guy, matching 1000 New Haven bikes with 1000 León teachers. She the finance gal, matching each precious cell to solidarity with Nicaragua.

It was as unlikely a thing as one could imagine. The oppressed, with little tangible means, rising up and vanquishing the oppressor. History records it as a date, one July 19, but it took years, lives, and that which drives people to achieve the impossible.

Around the world the Nicaraguan revolution has inspired three decades of struggle to be the change we seek. Through New Haven and León have passed over 1000 delegates, speakers, poets, muralists, creative arts therapists, Peace and Justice volunteers, mayors and marimba musicians. Countless cross cultural relationships have been born, mirroring the ever evolving 25 year relationship of the cities themselves.

Many have discovered a new sense of purpose and a changed way of looking at the world.

Why is it that tears still well in our eyes every time our flight comes in for a landing in Managua and every time it lifts off? Nicaragua was and is a reference point around the globe, a Yes We Can!, un ¡Si se puede!, many years before these achieved their current popularity. That, we will never forget, and those who don't know it must learn it. That is why we do what we do.



Susan Bramhall is a member of our board of directors, and Shelly Altman is a committed volunteer. They live in New Haven.

Other negative effects of climate change include possible reductions in crop yields. In some African countries, for example, yields could decline by as much as 50% by 2020. Global Warming Causes 300,000 Deaths a Year, Says Kofi Annan thinktank. **Since gasoline is about 87% carbon and 13% hydrogen by weight, the carbon in a gallon**

5.5 pounds (6.3 then multiply the carbon (5.5 which equals 20

Millions of people 600 neighborhoods are breathing toxic air pollutants much greater risk of

02 4 Earth

October 24th, 2009

**Join Actions Here, Nicaragua,
Everywhere to**

STOP GLOBAL WARMING

Call 203.562.1607 to get involved

of gasoline weighs lbs. x .87) We can the weight of pounds) by 3.7, pounds of CO2!

living in nearly across the country concentrations of that put them at a contracting cancer,

according to new data from the Environmental Protection Agency. **Motor vehicles per 1000 people: US 765; Nicaragua 33; 4 cars in Goyena w/ 200 families**

By 2100, parts of the South could experience 150 days a year with temperatures higher than ninety degrees. **Barabra Stocking, head of Oxfam said: "Adaptation efforts need to be scaled up dramatically. The world's poorest are the hardest hit, but they have done the least to cause it."**



How to Respond to this Political Climate?

Responding to widespread accusations that this Ortega administration committed fraud in last November's municipal elections, some European nations have suspended government aid to Nicaragua, and the United States has suspended aid administered through the Millennium Challenge Account.

Domestically, the Ortega administration finds itself alienated from many grassroots organizations, particularly those part of the feminist movement. Women's groups and other NGO's accuse the government of tightening off democratic spaces on the grassroots level. They allege that the government's "Zero Hunger" and "Zero Usury" programs are more about rhetoric than substantive sustainable change.

How do we support grassroots leadership every day in Goyena? How do we help make that leadership strong and sustainable?

Though it can be confusing to operate in this political climate, the NH/LSCP remains committed to following the lead of the poor and supporting their empowerment.

Update on the Cane Workers' Struggle

Former sugar cane workers with Chronic Renal Insufficiency (CRI) have entered into negotiations with representatives of Nicaragua Sugar Estates, Ltd. (NSEL).

Members of ASOCHIVIDA, the association of the affected from Chichigalpa, Chinandega, and the widows of those who have died, are in the process of negotiating the terms of a causality study of the disease. The company denies that their intensive chemical spraying causes the widespread illness among its workers, as those workers and their widows allege.

Members of ASOCHIVIDA recently negotiated to receive "humanitarian assistance" from the company while the long study is in process. The humanitarian assistance will take the form of medical and nutritional aid, as well as support for more sustainable development projects.

The negotiations are part of a process facilitated by the office of the Compliance Advisory Ombudsman (CAO), which addresses complaints filed by community members about projects financed with loans by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group.

ASOCHIVIDA was one of three communities which filed a complaint against the IFC for its loan to NSEL, alleging that the company was violating environmental, labor, and safety standards.

Among the communities who filed the initial complaint is Goyena, and a neighboring rural community of León called Abangasca, whose residents worry about the encroachment of cane onto their territory, and about the health and environmental effects of the regular burning of the cane.

NSEL is owned by Grupo Pellas, one of the most powerful financial consortiums in Central America. Grupo Pellas also owns Flor de Caña, Nicaragua's prized national rum, made with NSEL sugar.

NSEL and other sugar companies in the region have received an increasing number of loans from international finance institutions in recent years, for Ethanol plants and the manufacture of agro-fuels.



Fairfield University students and faculty in Nicaragua, March 2009.

The New Haven/León Sister City Project has been hosting delegations to Nicaragua since 1984.

If you'd like to organize or join a trip, contact Chris at (203) 562-1607, or email cschweitzer@newhavenleon.org

The New Haven/Leon Sister City Project is a proud member of New Haven Sister Cities, Inc. Alfula Gilboa, Israel ** Amalfi, Italy ** Avignon, France ** Freetown, Sierra Leon ** Hue Vietnam



León staff Ivett Fonseca & Antonieta Chevez



———— Celebrating 25 years in 2009! ————

“We were all able to see that we could achieve something by being united.”

-Goyena Community Leader Maria Eugenia Quiroz

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