



# New Haven/León Sister City Project

Fall 2008 Newsletter

## Dear Friends...

This issue of our newsletter highlights two cases of impressive youth leadership in León. Marta Osejo began teaching preschool in the rural community of Goyena as an inexperienced but courageous teenager, and Francis Alvarado dedicates time and energy to the teachers and families of Goyena despite her many commitments. These two women are good examples of young people drawing on available resources to think creatively about how they might make a difference in their own lives and the lives of others.

In June we welcomed a delegation of students from Hopkins High School in New Haven to León, and we were impressed by the willingness and ability of these students to think critically and creatively about what they found in Nicaragua. They came in from working on a water system in Goyena during the day, a water system generously funded by Middletown's South Congregation, to thoughtfully reflect; and to engage in lively debate and analysis of their visions and ideas.

These young people, *Nicaragüenses* and *Estadounidenses* alike, are learning and growing in a global political and economic context that is increasingly complex. They are asking difficult questions about power and resources, and are searching for answers among the resources that they have locally available to them on a daily basis. We're proud to continue to invite you into these processes of discovery and empowerment.

-NH/LSCP



*Goyena preschool students outside the classroom. See page 2 for a story about their favorite teacher! Photo by NH/LSCP intern Zoe Black.*

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*This image in our masthead comes from a mural which celebrates the literacy campaign of 1980. The Spanish text in the mural is of Gandhi's famous words of encouragement: "We should be the change we wish to see..."*

# Marta Osejo: Young Leadership in Goyena

Marta Osejo began teaching preschool in the rural community of Goyena when she was sixteen years old. She had no experience, no training, and no materials. But she accepted the challenge when the community leadership approached her after the previous teacher unexpectedly moved away in the middle of the school year.

"My grandmother, who raised me, talked to me about how it was a big responsibility to take on," Marta recalls. "That first year I had twenty-two students in three different levels. And I didn't even know where the kids were supposed to sit or that I was supposed to take attendance or anything!"

At that time, Marta was living alone with her grandmother, who had lost a leg in an accident during Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Determined to learn, Marta would come home from giving class, cook a meal for the two of them, and then bicycle up to an hour to visit preschool teachers in neighboring communities. "Teachers with more experience supported me," Marta says. "But I had to go find them."

Eventually, the Ministry of Education sent a representative to Goyena to offer support as well, but there was still the issue of space. "When I started, class was in that house right over there,"

Marta explains, gesturing out the door of her own home. The preschool moved to different houses four more times before finally landing last fall in the beautiful two-room school building constructed in collaboration with the NGO Viviendas León.

In the intervening eight years, Marta has attended teacher trainings run by the Ministry of Education, and the NH/LSCP has begun to support area preschool teachers with trainings and resources. She is now one of the more senior preschool teachers in the area, and shares what she's learned with others.

"The same thing can happen to any young person who likes to work with children. That's the only requirement," she says. "And patience."

Patience with children is required, but also patience with compensation: Marta's monthly 'stipend' from the Ministry of Education is about USD\$25/month. She cares for herself and her two children with money her husband, Reynaldo, earns working construction in Costa Rica.

Marta also explains that in the past eight years, she's gained a greater sense of confidence in herself. "I was very shy, very timid," she says, "but I learned that you can't be that way if you're



*Above: Community leader and preschool teacher Marta Osejo with her two-week-old son, Many, in their home. Below: A sampling from the classroom.*

going to work with children."

Others in the community have taken note of Marta's increased confidence and abilities, and last year she was elected to the community board of directors.



## Looking for '09 León Interns

We're looking for adventurous types to spend some time with us in León!

Interns must be functional in Spanish, free to stay for at least a month, flexible, open-minded, and at least 18 years old.

For 2009, we are looking for interns with experience/interest in education/teaching, psychology, or public health.

Visit our website for details.



## Thank You!

Teachers' trainings, our after school program, support for preschool teachers, justice work with and for sugar cane workers, delegations, efforts to establish a secondary school, an oral hygiene program for kids--- none of this work is possible without your financial support. Whether it is through our direct mail, phone or major gift campaigns, your generosity contributes to the daily work of the NH/LSCP.

Underlying all of our work is the vision of a just world. Working together, the community of Goyena and you, our US friends, Project staff and board can make the vision a reality.

As we approach our 25th anniversary in 2009, we promise to be faithful stewards of your trust.

-NHL/SCP Staff and Board

# Francis Alvarado: Pedagogy for Autonomy

Francis Alvarado Rodriguez, 24, began collaborating with the NH/LSCP in 2005, when she came to Goyena as a teacher at the Miguel Larreynaga school in Goyena. She got to know NH/LSCP staff, and began to collaborate with a series of public health workshops on sex education in the community, in partnership with NH/LSCP intern Andrea Schifferman.

Francis was invited to and excited about supporting these workshops because in addition to working as a teacher, she had just begun to pursue a degree in social work.

In 2006 Francis began working with the NH/LSCP as the coordinator of the after-school program teachers, working with them on lesson plans and dynamic pedagogy.

Part of the work of the after-school program is to introduce to students ways of learning that are more dynamic and engaging than the rote learning they are used to in the formal school. After-school teachers, following Francis's leadership, emphasize student participation in educational games to keep students' interest and excitement about learning.

Through interactive learning, she explains, teachers also focus on important social values with their students, such as sharing and communicating.

When asked how she could work in

the mornings as a teacher, in the afternoons with the after-school program, and study for a degree in social work, Francis laughs. "It's my passion; it's what I like to do.

"What I like most is to be able to facilitate a process of communication – to share ideas – and to bring ideas from the community back to the [NH/LSCP] office"

Francis is from the city of León, the Sutiava neighborhood, but prefers to work in the *campo*, the rural areas: "In the city, people have more access to existing resources, and there are more people working. People from the rural communities are forgotten; there's still more need there.

"I'd like to see people become stronger protagonists of their rights," Francis explains. "For example, with the secondary school," referring to the campaign in the community to get the Ministry of Education to assume responsibility for running a secondary school in Goyena. "There are only a few months left in the year to put pressure on the Ministry of Education."

What's a motivating long-term vision for Francis? "It's simple for me," she explains. "I hope people in Goyena become more independent, that they're able to continue on with good community projects, such as the community preschool."



*Francis Alvarado is an energetic young teacher and social-work student from León who has collaborated with the NH/LSCP for more than three years. She works to support and train after-school program teachers in the rural community of Goyena.*

"The thing is that NGO's come and go, so it's important that people in the community have a vision of their own autonomy," Francis explains.

"I hope people in Goyena become more independent... It's important that they have a vision of autonomy."

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## Secondary School Update: Let's Get Organized!

*In our last newsletter, we explained that the people of Goyena are struggling for a secondary school in their community. We have been raising funds for a pilot project in order to pressure the Ministry of Education to take responsibility for a secondary school in Goyena in 2009.*

Attendance rates have been steady at the secondary education program in Goyena over the last few months, with the largest numbers in the first-year class. Young people who have not been in a classroom since finishing sixth grade as many as eight years ago are re-dedicating themselves to studying.

This pilot program, supported by the NH/LSCP and a private secon-

dary school in urban León, will run through mid-December 2008. In July, a representative from the Ministry of Education told the NH/LSCP that the ministry is dedicated to assuming responsibility for secondary education in Goyena in 2009.

Community members, however, will not simply wait around for the Ministry of Education. Students, parents, and community leaders from Goyena are preparing to step up pressure on the Ministry of Education and municipal government throughout the fall. Through frequent letters and visits to León, they hope hold the Ministry to its promise.

If — *when* — an official secondary

school is opened in Goyena, it will cover the first three years of a five-year program. Students wishing to continue on with the fourth and fifth years of secondary school will still need to find a way to study in the city until the Ministry expands the school to keep up with demand. The struggle will continue!

***The NH/LSCP is still trying to raise funds to cover the costs of the pilot program that has served to energize students and parents, and prove to the Ministry that demand for secondary school education exists in full force in Goyena. Please help us out, and we'll keep you updated!***

# Work of our Hands, Change in our Hearts

*Kathy, Dan, and Corey Novak came to León with family friend Jennifer Bowers in February 2008. Dan and Jennifer spent time lending a hand at the health clinic in Goyena, while Kathy and Corey offered assistance in the classroom. They returned home to South Congregational Church in Middletown, CT, eager to share their involvement...*

Our initial shock was in seeing how poor the city of Leon was, despite being the second largest city in the country. There seemed to be as many horse and buggies as there were cars on the streets.

Our culture shock was eased by our wonderful host family. Dona Hortensia eased our culture shock, and saw to our needs even at the cost of her family's comfort.

Our surprise in Leon was nothing in comparison to our visit to Goyena, a village 14 km outside of Leon. It took almost an hour and tumultuous travel over an incredibly rocky, rutted road to travel the nine miles to the village. This was the only road between Leon and Goyena.

The houses were made of tin, wood, thatch and at times scraps

of plastic. The two schools and the medical clinic were cinder block but both lacked electricity. The streets were dirt and rutted and traversed by livestock and people on foot without a car in sight.

Our small delegation split with two of us working in the medical clinic and the other two in the schools. The clinic had medicines supplied by the government that were doled out freely, but the type and amounts were limited.

We saw mainly routine office ailments, and many people came in with minor conditions so as to see the 'American' doctor. Our presence did little to improve the quality of medical care at the time, but hopefully the supplies we brought will go a long way to improve the overall care.

As in the clinic, the schools lacked many of the basic supplies, and what they did have was antiquated and in need of repair. But there was a real desire to learn, with many of the children forgoing recess to stay in and do extra work. Those that did go outside for recess had nothing to play with but their imaginations and each other.

As in the clinic, our presence did little to help the educational process in Goyena, but again the supplies we brought should go a long way.

Once we were back in Middletown and presented our trip to our South Congregational Church community, it

was obvious that the work of our hands and the change in our hearts were to be translated into tangible offerings to our brothers and sisters in Goyena.

We informed our church council of the absence of running water in the medical clinic and one of the schools in a meeting held just two nights after our return. The result was a unanimous vote for our congregation to fund a water project for both the school and the clinic.

Now, some 6 months later, a new water system has been installed in that village and there was money left over for some home roofs to be repaired in preparation for the rainy season.

God willing, we look forward to returning to Goyena someday to visit the friends we made and continue our relationships with our brothers

*By Kathy and Corey Novak*

## Making Fresh Water More Accessible



*Images from the June 2008 construction of a water system for a school and health clinic in Goyena. The project was made possible by funds from South Congregation Church in Middletown, CT; the labor of Hopkins High School students from New Haven; the know-how of engineers from León; and the organization and coordination efforts of community members.*

### Part-Time Position in New Haven Office

The NH/LSCP is looking for an assistant director of outreach and development.

15 hours/week starting in Dec./Jan.

The position involves working with good people on a variety of tasks.

Commitment to social justice essential. Need communication, organizing and writing skills.

Experience in development and fund raising preferred. Or sincere interest in learning these skills. Two year commitment.

**For more information call Patty:  
(203) 562-1607**

## To Do:



### Learn what the candidates say:

Witness for Peace ([www.witnessforpeace.org](http://www.witnessforpeace.org)) has created a fact sheet comparing the Latin America policies of John McCain and Barack Obama. Go to the "Issues" page and find out what the candidates propose for trade, human rights, drug policy, militarization, democracy, and migration.

**But remember... candidates don't create social justice... organized, active, noisy people do!**



### Learn about labor rights in the Americas:

Check out US Labor Education in the Americas Project: [www.usleap.org](http://www.usleap.org). At our request, USLEAP called their local congressperson, Senator Durbin, to seek support for the campaign of Nicaraguan sugar workers (see below). See [www.newhaveleon.org/solidarity/](http://www.newhaveleon.org/solidarity/) for more on how you can do the same!

**Brush Every Day:** Photos of children brushing their teeth (or, on page 2, showing them off!) were taken by intern Zoe Black. Zoe came to León for a month this summer, and initiated an oral hygiene program for Goyena kids.

**Dance:** The photos on page 6 of young dancers are from the youth dance group in Goyena. The NH/LSCP supports their dance instructor's travel to and from the community.

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## News from the Rest of Nicaragua

### Sugar

In June representatives from the office of the Compliance Advisory Ombudsman (CAO) of the World Bank visited Nicaragua to begin preliminary investigations of the complaint filed by communities against Nicaragua Sugar Estates.

Community members in the departments of León and Chinandega allege that the USD\$55 million loan from the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the arm of the World Bank that provides private sector loans, was issued to the sugar company despite its violations of Nicaraguan laws as well as World Bank labor and environmental regulations.

CAO representatives interviewed former sugar cane workers who claim that exposure to harsh agrochemicals have caused fatal kidney disease, and with people from communities surrounding the cane who are worried about environmental damages caused by destructive harvesting practices.

CAO representatives will return in early October to present their findings and offer recommendations on how to proceed with negotiations.

**Visit our website for more information and how to help:**  
[www.newhavenleon.org/solidarity](http://www.newhavenleon.org/solidarity)

### Energy

The price of food in Central America continues to rise along with the price of fossil fuels worldwide. Many energy producers and consumers are turning to agro-fuels as a 'clean' alternative. The president of Nicaragua's National Federation of Cooperatives, Sinfiriano Cáceres, explains the impact of these practices:

"There are two kinds of agro-fuels: ethanol, which is produced from sugar cane and maize; and biodiesel, produced from African palm and soy. In short, the base in both cases is primary products, people's basic foods. .... The height of irony is that basic consumer products here in the third world are now becoming exportable to the North, not for consumption by its population, but for consumption by their cars."

Cáceres goes on to explain that people like the Pellas family, who own Nicaragua Sugar Estates, are renting land from small farmers who previously grew corn and other consumables, in order to produce Ethanol. He says, "We're entering into a competition between stomachs and fuel tanks."

**Find Cáceres's article, "We Need More Action and Less Talk" at [www.envio.org](http://www.envio.org).**

### Politics

Dora Maria Tellez, former Sandinista revolutionary commander, was on hunger strike in the capitol for 13 days this June to protest the recent exclusion of the Sandinista Renovation Movement's (MRS) from political processes, and the "pact," a long-standing power-sharing agreement between President Daniel Ortega of the FSLN and Arnoldo Alemán of the opposition conservative party.

Tellez co-founded the MRS with Sergio Ramirez, Ortega's vice-president in the 1980's, and explained that the rationale for her hunger strike was to draw attention to corruption in the current Ortega administration and the resulting exacerbation of poverty.

"The fast that God wants is the struggle against injustices," Tellez explains. "We waged our hunger strike to demand democracy, but "democracy with *gallopinto* [rice and beans]... And the amount of *gallopinto* people could buy a year ago was double what they can buy now. They can only buy half the beans, half the rice, half the cooking oil and half the salt that they could a year ago."

**Read more news and analysis from and about Dora Maria Tellez and the MRS at [www.envio.org](http://www.envio.org).**

Words from inside....

“...the work of our hands and the change in our hearts were translated into tangible offerings...”

“Community members are preparing to **step up pressure** on the Ministry of Education.” ... “We waged our hunger strike to **demand democracy**, but democracy **with gallopinto**.” ... “We’re entering into a competition between **stomachs and fuel tanks**.” ... “I’d like to see people become **stronger protagonists of their rights**.”



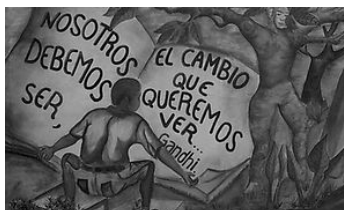
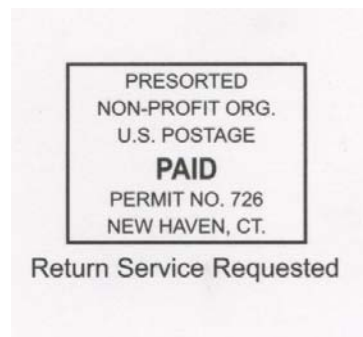
**We don't have to wait for anybody to tell us to organize. We have to trust ourselves, what we can do..., our capacities and strength as a people .... -Dora Maria Tellez**

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**NHL** Celebrating 25 Years in 2009!



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