



New Haven/León Sister City Project

Summer 2014 Newsletter

Promoting Produce Consumption in a Low-Veggie Locale

By Laurel Cohen

I came to León to work to improve childhood nutrition in the community of Goyena. When I began to explore the community, it quickly became clear to me that vegetables, an integral part of any healthy diet, were very scarce in the typical fare of the community. That near absence seemed to me an obvious topic on which to focus my summer work. Adequate intake of vegetables is especially important for children because it helps ensure healthy formation of the pivotal cognitive and emotional capacities that develop during childhood.

Before brainstorming possible solutions, I expanded my zone of investigation and realized that this low prioritization of vegetables is not limited to Goyena: Nicaraguans in general don't eat many vegetables. This meant that my work would be more difficult, and rather than just approaching the lack of vegetables in Goyena as an issue of access or planning, it would be necessary to inculcate in people an appreciation for vegetables in the context of a society that did not value them very much.

Through past projects related to food, I've come to believe that people care more about vegetables if they have a hand in growing them; thus, my initial idea for how to encourage vegetable consumption in Goyena was establishing a community garden. I began amassing research at the same time as I probed in the community for past garden projects. I found out about two previous projects. The first was about six years ago, when a man from the Peace Corps established a community garden for a summer in Goyena; it fell into disuse shortly after he left. The other happened about two years ago, when a teacher at the school in Goyena led the children in establishing and maintaining a school vegetable garden during the term; this project was started as part of a government program designed to expose children to vegetable cultivation, but like the other garden project in Goyena, it ended quickly and without follow-up. Discovering that the idea of a community garden was far from new in Goyena

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Mural above by Leonel Cerrato from Estelí, Nicaragua.

encouraged me greatly. But after learning of several sobering logistical roadblocks, investigating the Nicaraguan climate (the dry season can be brutal, and people want to use water for only what is totally necessary), and speaking with people in the community (who seemed thoroughly uninterested in communal efforts, seeing their individual and family workloads as plenty), I reached the conclusion that establishing a community garden would not be a useful endeavor in Goyena.

A natural turn from the community garden concept was family gardens. During my research, I read about a World Bank Project in Nicaragua that had success in increasing household produce consumption by helping women establishing family gardens. Buoyed by this idea, I continued my research into creating gardens and began asking women in the community if this idea appealed to them. This potential track was cut short rather quickly when women informed me that in the community's new location (that they had to move to after Hurricane Mitch destroyed their former site), the children had virtually no places to play except for the small backyards by the houses, and that it would not be worth the loss of these play areas to plant vegetables.



Laurel in León

Two Earthquakes in Less Than 24 Hours

By Luis Chavarria, NHLSCP staff

On April 10th this year, an earthquake struck the nearby town of Nagarote in the Department of León with magnitude 6.2 on the seismic scale. This event triggered a series of aftershocks. Characteristic of Nicaragua, and consistent with the custom of the population, these events were not taken very seriously.

Government authorities and the general public took a more serious look the next day when another earthquake hit with the epicenter near the Momotombo volcano. This new series of aftershocks occurred near Managua and there were up to 40 micro earthquakes in the next 12 hours.

A red alert was declared by the government in the most at-risk areas near the Pacific Ocean, including León. School classes were suspended at all levels. The authorities began a risk rating process of structures and began the evacuation of homes and public buildings such as schools and hospitals. They ordered mandatory evacuation if the walls had faults. Over 1000 houses were damaged, 44 structures had to be demolished, and two people died.

In León, the 3rd and 4th floors of the Oscar Danilo Rosales Hospital were evacuated because of serious fractures or cracks in the walls.

Leon established an interagency committee composed of the Mayor, the Ministry of Education and civil defense authorities to inspect the infrastructure of all schools at all levels in León. For four weeks schools in Leon and Managua had been suspended to limit risk to children until inspections could be made.

In the community of Goyena, there were cracks in the walls of one new classroom, and the interagency committee determined it irreparable and that it threatened public safety. They gave the demolition order and

that day began demolition without discussion with the community or NHLSCP, which had helped build the classroom. NHLSCP is asking to see the demolition order to try to understand why the structure was deemed unsafe. The Ministry of Education did promise to re-build the classroom (although no start date has been given) and all the steel roofing, structural steel and doors and windows can be re-used.

Also, the nearby preschool had 28 fractures in the walls, especially in the kitchen area. The Ministry of Education said the preschool should also be demolished. But the representative of nonprofit Viviendas León, which has done significant construction in Nicaragua, convinced them that the building was structurally sound and only needed some repairs to interior walls.

In Goyena there were five houses damaged by the earthquake, causing concern among residents that they might be exposed to higher risk.

Luis Chavarria coordinates the Environmental Youth Brigade and manages the office finances and administration.

Photos from top to bottom: Students practice earthquake drills in Goyena; Workers take down damaged classroom.



Veggies... *continued from p. 1*

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I came to León to work to improve childhood nutrition in the community of Goyena. When I began to explore the community, it quickly became clear to me that vegetables, an integral part of any healthy diet, were very scarce in the typical fare of the community. That near absence seemed to me an obvious topic on which to focus my summer work. Adequate intake of vegetables is especially important for children because it helps ensure healthy formation of the pivotal cognitive and emotional capacities that develop during childhood.

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Improved Cookstove Implementation in Goyena

by Ragini Luthra

The goal of this article is to get you excited about cookstoves in a way that you never thought you could be! No matter what your interest in Goyena's development is – health, sustainability, women's rights, the economy – the problem of Household Air Pollution (HAP) due to the use of rudimentary stoves is relevant. This summer, I am spending two months in Leon as a Peace and Justice Intern to help install improved cookstoves and increase awareness of the effects of household smoke in Goyena.



Ragini in León office.

Through a global health course at Yale, I had learned that HAP is an important and growing problem in developing countries. Still, I didn't understand the true magnitude of the problem until spending several weeks in Goyena. Through a survey I completed of 50 families in Goyena during my first month here, I found that 96% of the community used cement block "stoves" for cooking. That is, only two of the surveyed families regularly use improved cookstoves to reduce the amount of smoke accumulating in the kitchen. This is a much higher proportion than the, still disturbing, 67% of overall Nicaraguans that use rudimentary stoves. 40.4% of the children of the interviewed families were reported to have respiratory illnesses such as asthma or bronchitis.

"Kitchens" in Goyena consist, most often, of tin shacks with only small (seemingly accidental) holes for ventilation. Biomass-fired cookstoves and open fires emit carbon monoxide and other pollutants at levels up to 100 times the acceptable limit as

defined by the World Health Organization. The walls and roof of the "kitchens" are black from over-exposure to these pollutants. The women of Goyena spend hours every day bent over pots billowing with smoke, inhaling toxins.

A few companies already produce improved cookstoves in Nicaragua. Goyena's preschool has one made by Mi Cocina, a Leon-based company. Members of the community who have seen or used the preschool stove felt overwhelmingly positively about owning a similar stove. In fact, 58% of respondents preferred improved wood stoves to either gas or electric stoves. 12% did not feel that they knew enough about other technologies to pick one that they would prefer. After looking into several other companies, I believe it would be most beneficial to Goyena to work with Prolena, a company headquartered in Managua that the World Bank contracted for a project about ten years ago. The stoves they produce are similar to those of Mi Cocina, but have generally longer life span and wider chimneys that prevent backflow of smoke into the house.

One of the greatest challenges that similar cookstove projects have faced is ensuring that the stoves continue to be used after the project is no longer being monitored. Unlike Mi Cocina, Prolena also produces improved cookstoves without chimneys. While a technology with a chimney would be the most effective in reducing smoke in the house, chimneys require a great amount of maintenance and need to be replaced at least every two years (sometimes more often). To install stoves without chimneys would certainly be compromising slightly on the smoke reduction but would potentially help ensure that the stoves are workable for many more years.

In the next few weeks, we will be working with the community to decide on the exact model that would be preferred and to begin a pilot project with a few families. These first stoves will be used to demonstrate to other

Rain, What Rain? Over 600 hardy energetic upbeat souls braved the wet and cold in April for the Rock to Rock Earth Day Bike Ride... which raised over \$150,000 for environmental work in New Haven. Below, riders gather near West Rock before the ride; and Aaron Jafferis, Shelly Altman, and Susan Bramhall warm up post-rain at East Rock Park.



families the benefits of improved stoves and as a teaching device for proper maintenance of the stoves.

These improved stoves will serve to decrease deforestation, greenhouse gas pollution, respiratory illness, and vision problems. They will reduce the amount of time women in Goyena must spend cooking and gathering or buying wood, hopefully allowing them to use their time for other pursuits and reducing the gender gap over time. With the implementation of improved cookstoves, Goyena's women and children will have a greater opportunity to lead healthy, productive lives.

Ragini Luthra is entering her junior year at Yale. She is originally from India, but grew up in Saudi Arabia. She enjoys running and loves animals. Her work in Leon is supported through a Yale Fellowship.

Seeing Climate Change as My Problem

By Talia Gallagher

Public health and climate change are issues that are in the corporate media background, and only get attention once in a while. For most of my life I knew climate change was problematic, but I did not think about it much unless someone else brought it up. I can definitely empathize with the public's apathetic attitude on climate change and public health as a whole.

When I first started working here at NHLSCP I remember thinking that I wanted to get experience with international issues, so why was I working on a local environmental campaign? It wasn't until I started actually organizing the goNewHavengo campaign that the importance of this climate/public health effort to the global community became clear.

The goNHgo campaign itself is set up as a competition between both organizations and individuals to use the most alternative transit in July. The focus of goNHgo is on both cutting greenhouse gas pollution and improving local public health.

The hope is that group participation in goNHgo will make it easier for individuals to stay dedicated to the campaign with the encouragement and empathy of others involved. Rewards also can be a strong encouragement - prizes include gift cards for restaurants, bike shops, and ice cream - but they do not

take away the challenge of making a lifestyle change.

One of the best motivations however is the personal improvement that comes from driving a car less. Biking and walking help improve individual health and incorporates exercise into one's regular transportation routine. This also helps decrease the pressure of having to get in a workout every single day.

goNHgo is not only about changing our commute to work, as commuting to work only accounts for 15 percent of all car trips a person takes (Summary of Travel Trends; 2009, US Department of Transportation) and leaves out the majority of travel. One way to increase active transportation is to commit to walk or bike on all trips within a one mile radius of your home. It is a great way to get a fair amount of exercise. Starting out with smaller steps like this is the best way to make green behavior habitual.

While biking and walking are great forms of alternative transit, they are not the only options. There are many bus and ride share options. For example, CT Rides helps organizations get involved in alternative transit and offers various benefits. Carpooling is also another great alternative to decrease the number of single occupancy cars all traveling in the same direction!

Helping out the environment can also happen through adjusting work schedules. More managers are allowing their employees to work from home one day a week or every other week. This saves the trip to work and allows people to spend more *Continued on p. 5*

Strategic Planning in Process



NH/LSCP Board works on Five Year Strategic Plan in June. The plan looks at program development, fundraising, personnel, and other opportunities/challenges for the coming years.

Wishing for a Way to Help Out?

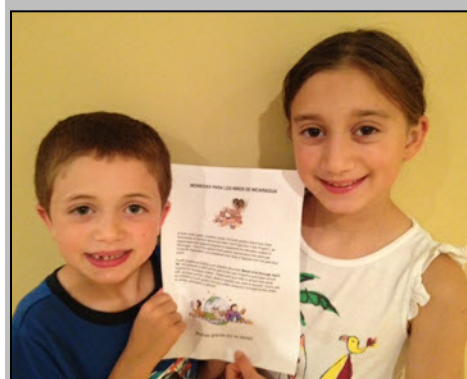
Many Ways to Get Involved...

- Lead a Delegation •
- Volunteer in New Haven Office •
- Organize a Coin Drive •
- Intern in New Haven or León

Projects include public health, rural education, fundraising, climate change, social justice, community-based theater.

Contact Chris at

nh@newhavenleon.org or 203.562.1607.



Coin Drive for Schools in Goyena

Parents, teachers and students at A.W. Cox Elementary School in Guilford organized a coin drive in March to support education in Nicaragua that raised \$249 for school supplies and teacher training. Above are two students who helped out, Zoe and Owen, with a letter to parents. Thank you!!

My Problem

... continued from p. 4

spend more time at home.

All of these methods of alternative transit are being tracked throughout July for goNHgo through the NuRides web site. There are an array of organizations signed up that include Academics Stand Against Poverty, Elm City Cycling, Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, Holland Hats, Neighborhood Housing Services, New Haven Bioregional Group, New Haven Land Trust, New Haven Leon SCP, and Yale Office of Sustainability.

It's understandable - in this car-centric culture - that changing behaviors can be very difficult and even feel tedious when the rewards aren't immediately apparent. However, reminding yourself of all the good that you are doing for yourself and your community can keep you motivated to keep moving until it becomes a routine!

Forty percent of people's actions everyday are not thought out

decisions, but habits (The Power of Habit; xvi). Just taking a step back from habits and critically thinking about your everyday actions is a big step towards greener, healthier behaviors.

As I have been vegetarian for three and a half years and vegan for one, I understand the struggle involved in setting a new behavior pattern. For me, making myself conscious of the larger implications of the problem helped. Consistently reminding myself that I did not want to eat meat eventually created a new eating pattern, and then I did that again not too long ago in becoming a vegan. Now I cannot imagine going back to how I ate before. Pushing yourself through the rough patches in the beginning of habit change can have a phenomenal impact on your future behaviors and attitudes.

Talia Gallagher is a summer intern and a rising sophomore at Clark University studying International Development and Sociology.

Art, Education and Climate Change



Photos from top to bottom: Artist Haley Grunloh (left) and volunteer work on climate change banner on the New Haven Green during the Arts and Ideas Festival; Interns Talia Gallagher and Jeff Curtin with car art with a per capita greenhouse gas graph on top; Talia with kids doing art at Audubon Street art festival; and tabling at Yale Earth Day celebration.



PEOPLE'S CLIMATE MARCH
NEW YORK CITY | SEPT. 21



NHLSCP will be working to have a BIG contingent head to NYC for this IMPORTANT March... Please join us September 21! More details soon.

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*NH/LSCP supports education
and sustainable development in
Nicaragua and New Haven.*

Estimated: 1,433,617 Bumps,
Pot Holes, Rocks, Crevices, Jolts,
and Obstacles between León
and Goyena...

Needed: New School Bus, Supply
Truck, Ambulance, Teacher
Taxi, Tour Van, etc... No
Donation Too Big. Thank You!

Celebrate the 30th
Anniversary of
NHLSCP

Night of Stories /
Noche
de
Cuentos

Saturday,

October 18

5pm til...

NEW HAVEN/LEÓN
SISTER CITY PROJECT

30TH
ANNIVERSARY
1984-2014

A CELEBRATION OF HOPE
AND SOLIDARITY