

Boletín | Newsletter

of the Asociación TransAmericana de Voluntarios En Solidaridad

OUR FIRST NEWSLETTER

We're excited to bring you the first official newsletter of ATRAVES. Andrew Frishman, a member of the U.S. Board of Directors, and longtime friend, sent a copy of a book to each of us last year called *We Make the Road by Walking*, by Myles Horton and Paolo Freire. Inspired by the Spanish phrase *se hace el camino al andar*, this book is a transcribed dialogue between two educators from different countries, committed to social and economic justice. They try out new ideas, explore similarities and differences in their practice, and work together to learn as they go. Andrew knew what he was doing in selecting this gift. ATRAVES has been, from our beginning, a path we have made by walking, an experiment, and a dialogue. In this, our first official newsletter, you can see some of the voices in the conversation, some of what we have learned along the way, and some of where we're going in the future. Thank you for walking with us! *-Brady Dunklee, Executive Director.*



A WORD FROM LETICIA

Although it is a holiday that we don't normally celebrate here, I know that Acción de Gracias (Thanksgiving) has just passed in the US. Nicaragua is a country with a deep feeling of national pride and identity. We Nicaraguans have a special word for turkey, *chompipe* [different from the Spanish *pavo*], which comes from our indigenous roots, which we remember and are very important to us. As the school year comes to an end, and 2010 is nearly over, I think about what we are thankful for, what we are proud of, and what makes our work special and important.



I am thankful for all the friends who have helped me since we began this journey called ATRAVES with nothing more than crazy ideas more than 8 years ago.

This year, I am thankful for the volunteers of the University of Michigan, Engineers Without Borders, Unitarian Church of Sharon, and the education group in August. I appreciate all of the individual volunteers: Allison and Orrie, Pam and Elaine, Katrina and Jonah, Erica, Corey, Kirat. I am grateful for our newest staff member Lara, and the other hardworking members of my staff. I thank all of the generous donors in the US and Nicaragua, who have made it financially possible to work fulfilling our mission. I keep Lauren's memory close to my heart as we continue our community work.

We are proud of our accomplishments this year. They include great progress in our partnership with the artisans of San Juan de Oriente, health projects that are an enormous benefit to community members of Barrio William Galeano, and excellent professional development workshops for teachers. We are happy to see the Casa de Salud nearly finished, thanks to the hard work of Engineers Without Borders, volunteers from the community, Francisco, William and other workers. When disaster struck across Nicaragua in August, we were the first to help with relief efforts in the neighborhood, thanks to the commitment of ATRAVES volunteers and donors.

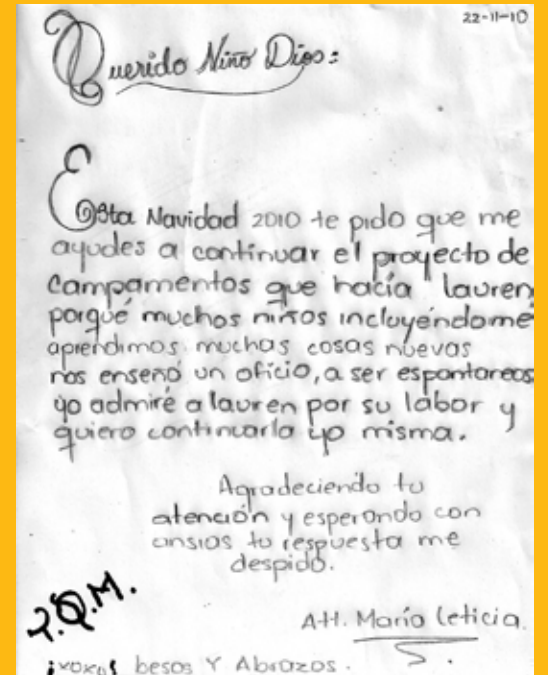
I always say that it's easy to give, but difficult to give oneself. What makes ATRAVES special is that we do not only give money, or services, or projects—we give ourselves to the communities we work with. We walk with them, accompany them, listen to them, feel that we are a part of them. Solidaridad is what makes our work possible, special, and important, and as we look forward to the new year, I thank you for yours. *-Leticia Rojas B., Directora Ejecutiva*

FROM THE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

In October we had our first ever ATRAVES fundraiser at Escuela HD in Barrio William Galeano. It was fundraising season in the States, and we decided to participate from Managua this year, because no part of solidarity work should be completely one-sided. We also understand that the world's economy is pretty heavily one-sided, so we focused on throwing a good party, not on the returns. We hardly expected to break even.



Leticia explained to the crowd that this event was a fundraiser for ATRAVES health projects in the community; for the taxi fares to the hospital, the prescriptions, the new clinic's night-guard, and the endless ibuprofen and bandages. And in Barrio William Galeano, where people make \$1 or so a day if they're lucky, on a sweltering Saturday afternoon, amidst dancing and games and delicious food, we raised \$250. More than we make at some events in the States.



From Leticia's young niece, a touching note and prayer illustrating our Volunteer Coordinator Lauren Wilkinson's lasting legacy. Lauren passed away at age 26 nearly a year ago.

"Dear Baby Jesus: This Christmas 2010 I ask you to help continue the the day-camp project that Lauren did, because many children, including me, learned many new things. She taught us crafts, and to be spontaneous. I admired Lauren for her work, and I want to continue it myself. Thank you for your help, and I'm anxiously awaiting a reply. Sincerely, Maria Leticia."

Since I arrived last April, I've spent a lot of time sitting in the courtyard of Escuela HD, observing what goes on around me. I've watched hundreds of community members come to the gates looking for Leticia, a teacher, Ely, Fernando, Don William, or myself. They come to gossip, to unload, to laugh, to see what's going on, to ask for help for their family, to ask for help for their fellow community members, and to see why we're playing such loud music. And I've noticed that recently - since the landslide in



August, the evacuation to the shelter, and all the upheaval that's followed - more and more people are coming. But it isn't because of the increased need or a new perception that we have more service capacity. These women, men and young adults, are coming with a better understanding of our organization, with a sense of solidarity for those doing community work, and with the faith that we will listen when issues arise. They're also coming to volunteer, to learn, and to suggest new endeavors.

ATRAVES has partner projects across Nicaragua. We come and we go and we send volunteers, and we've seen the results are positive. But for me, this year has been about our increasingly intense involvement in William Galeano. As ATRAVES staff, we believe that these people, adversely affected by so many things greater than themselves – natural disasters, war, economic injustice– have the ability and drive to come together and do great things. And we're seeing that they trust us to support them in whatever way we can, even if we have minimal funding and strange-looking volunteers. There is a momentum right now in William Galeano, at the end of this emotional winter, and we were overwhelmed by it that night at the Escuela HD fundraiser. I can't wait to see where it takes us in 2011.
-Lara Jackson, Volunteer Coordinator



SAN JUAN DE ORIENTE

ATRAVES has been working with a group of artisans from San Juan de Oriente who are in the process of becoming an official cooperative. Individual volunteers Katrina, Jonah, and Erica spent time with the group this year, teaching basic computer skills including email use, attaching pictures, and basic word processing. This past August, under the guidance of group coordinator, Don Alfredo Espinoza, the group participated for the first time in an artisan fair in Managua. They are planning to participate in another this December. The group meets several times a month and shares a small storefront in Don Alfredo's workshop, which was mentioned in the most recent Lonely Planet Nicaragua. Group members have expressed to ATRAVES that aside from the volunteer-led classes, presence at fairs, and increased international exposure, they are most pleased with the opportunity to work together, network, and express themselves and their work to their fellow artisans.



SHELTER

Thanks to La Niña, 2010 saw one of the wettest winters in Nicaraguan history. Barrio William Galeano in Managua, where Escuela HD and the new Casa de Salud are located, is set on a steep hill of loose clay-like soil. Community members watched as torrents of water poured through their yards, washing away houses and retaining walls. After one such collapse killed a young family of three, the Nicaraguan army evacuated all residents living in dangerous conditions. These

evacuees have been living in a nearby high school for three and a half months. Their land has been deemed uninhabitable and they are waiting for the government to fulfill their promise of a new place to live. Thanks to the outpouring of financial support from the ATRAVES network, we were able to provide intense relief in our initial response to this disaster and have continued to be a presence in the shelter ever since. We will keep you updated on the resolution of this situation and the aftermath in the community. Watch video of the Camilo Ortega shelter here: <http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2010/11/04/la-prensa-en-video/42638>

CASA DE SALUD

This fall, the Cal Poly student chapter of Engineers Without Borders completed structural construction on the most solid, beautiful, earth-quake-proof future health clinic in all of Managua. ATRAVES is extremely grateful to this generous, hard-working group for all they have done over the past few years to realize this project. Local workers are currently securing the building, installing doors, windows, and iron bars. Pictures of the finished product will be posted to the 'Atraves Volunteers' Facebook page shortly. EWB plans to continue their work in the William Galeano community with new, innovative projects, while ATRAVES is taking over the interior finishing stage of the clinic. This stage includes installing walls, tiled floors, ceilings, and utilities. There is plenty of work yet to be done before the clinic can open, and we encourage everyone to volunteer, donate, help us find program resources, and spread the word around to your networks. This structure will house clinical services, health education workshops, and community health leadership training sessions.



NEW VOLUNTEER, OLD VOLUNTEER

“Niños! Formen—una—fila—por—favor” Jesse shouted to the Escuela HD fourth and fifth graders in very intentional Spanish. To my amazement, his loud but careful language worked! The antsy students lined up, while Jesse continued to explain the relay races that were about to begin. Shortly after the start, Jesse’s instructions were forgotten and ordered lines deteriorated into blobs of excited cheering kids. Regardless, the activity ended in smiles and laughter, keys to success.



This past summer, Jesse and I were members of a small eight-member education delegation with ATRAVES. Jesse, my younger brother, and a well-traveled recent high school graduate, had decided to join me on my third trip volunteering in Nicaragua. We worked with other high school students, college students, and US and Nicaraguan professionals to examine the Nicaraguan educational system and participate in it. We planned a number of lessons that we implemented in schools in different parts of the country.

In our travels, we got to see everything from artists in San Juan de Oriente to farmers in Jinotega. There were comfortable moments where we got to share in people’s joy and uncomfortable moments where traditional foods did not sit quite right. I continued my intercultural journey and watched as Jesse began his. Despite his relative youth and introversion, he quickly established himself and impressed me with the poise he demonstrated in his work.

When Jesse signed up, I was excited to share such an important part of my life with him. I saw it as an opportunity to share a slice of my family with the people who had shared so much of their families and lives with me. I hoped that Jesse’s presence would be meaningful and that he would become a part of the ATRAVES family/solidarity network. Now, back in the US only a few months later, but already planning my next trip, I am confident that Jesse is a part of ATRAVES too.

-Corey Blant, Executive Board Member, ATRAVES at the University of Michigan

DONATE

Can you support ATRAVES with a financial gift this season?

Donate online at
www.atraves.org/help/donate.html

Or send a check to ATRAVES U.S. Inc.,
146 Verndale Ave., Providence RI 02905.

ATRAVES U.S. Inc. is a 501 (c) 3 organization, and donations are tax deductible.

FRIEND US ON FACEBOOK!
LOOK FOR “ATRAVES VOLUNTEERS.”

¡COME TO NICARAGUA!

Enroll now in 2011 Open Delegations

ATRAVES is offering four open delegation weeks in the upcoming months (January-March), as part of our ‘Week Across Borders’ program. Proceeds and donations will allow us to complete basic clinic construction in time for our summer health projects. The weeks’ itineraries are jam-packed with service work, ATRAVES project site visits, cultural learning experiences, and fun travel. We invite you, your friends, families, and colleagues to join us. More information about Week Across Borders is at www.atraves.org. If you would like to help with the recruitment effort, contact Lara Jackson at lara@atraves.org. Please forward widely.