

By MARINELLA ABBONDATI

Over dinner in Granada, Nicaragua in 2001 a Dutch family pondered what they could do to help the situation in the country whose poverty deeply affected them. So was born La Esperanza; the family left an endowment to provide school supplies, backpacks, shoes and tuition fees for the students in poor schools in the Granada area.

A group of foreign and Nicaraguan individuals joined forces and in two villages outside Granada to receive support, and the foundation, which came to be known as La Esperanza, was formed in the summer of 2002.

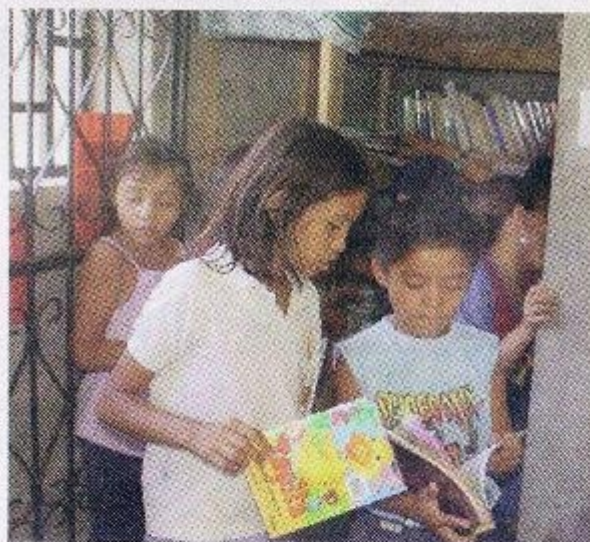
Since then the organization has grown to cover four villages in the areas surrounding Granada, La Prussia, El Pochote, La Epifania and Las Camelias. Education remains the primary focus but the foundation's work has branched out into other areas.

International volunteers are sent to assist and support teachers across the curriculum in local schools, whilst others teach English or assist with community projects or administration.

Donations are also channeled into educational resources. Last month La Esperanza celebrated the opening of a new library in La Prussia, situated in its Casa La Esperanza community center. Not only will the library provide much needed access to books for local children, but it will also serve the whole community, it is hoped.

Grass-roots development work undertaken by La Esperanza has also reached into the realm of micro-business, supporting women in starting their own businesses from home.

As part of a women's cooperative program, arts and crafts produced by women are sold in the



Local children at the opening of a new library in La Prussia, in May.

organization's office in central Granada. Passing trade also attracts interest from foreign visitors, so selling products serves a dual purpose. These products are also exported around the world by ex-volunteers and other international supporters.

The micro-business scheme enables women to earn extra income for their families, through work that fits around their home lives and responsibilities.

"But it means more than extra chicken and vegetables in with the rice and beans," says Pauline Jackson, La Esperanza's Operations Officer.

"You really see the difference in these women. They are more confident with their new found economic empowerment. They walk taller," she explains.



Handicraft products on sale alongside photos and explanations of the organization's work at the Granada office.

Originally from Australia, Jackson is the permanent face of La Esperanza in Granada, working on an entirely voluntary basis for two years.

La Esperanza remains committed to a zero-overhead policy. Administration and fundraising are carried out by long-term volunteers and supporters, both in Granada and worldwide. The organization survives thanks to generous donations, not only financial but also donations in kind, of equipment and facilities.

Amongst other things, this means that at La Esperanza, unlike many other NGOs, volunteers

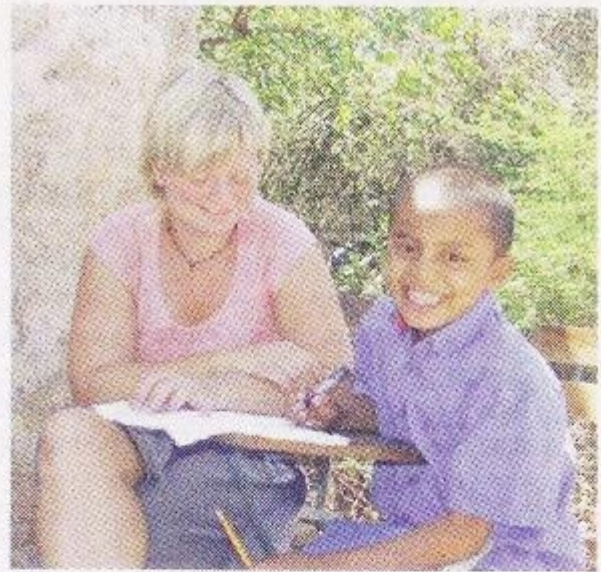
are asked only to cover their own travel and living expenses—no-one pays to give their time.

There may not be anything revolutionary about La Esperanza's approach, and the organization does not purport to having a political bent, but its successes speak for themselves, highlighting the importance of small-scale, grassroots development work carried out with passion and commitment.

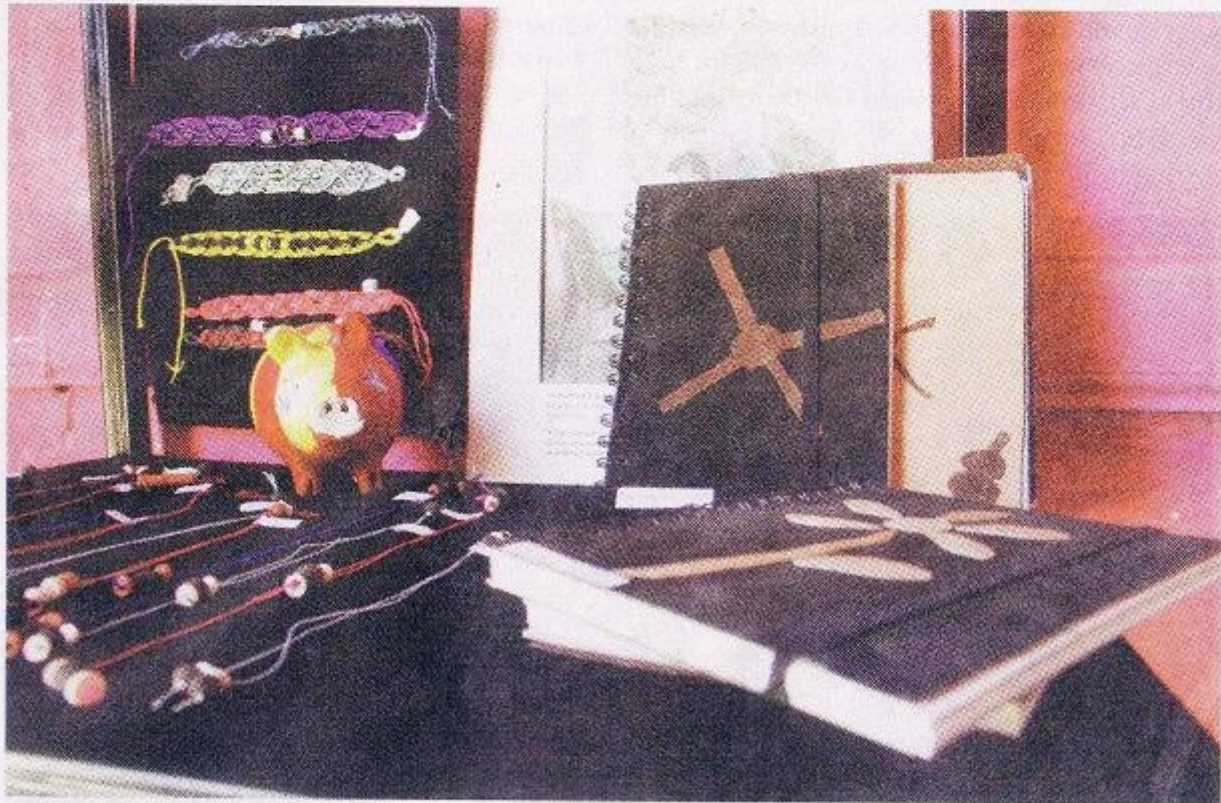
For more information on how to donate or become involved, visit www.la-esperanza-granada.org or email a_esperanza_granada@yahoo.com



A volunteer works with a group of primary school children.



A volunteer provides one-on-one support .



Stationery, jewelry and ceramics are amongst the handicrafts produced by local women and sold through La Esperanza's office.