



## VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION MANUAL

**Thank you** for coming to Granada to work with us and help improve education in the Nicaraguan schools. It is a pleasure to welcome you to La Esperanza Granada, and we hope that you will find your time here rewarding and enjoyable. The help that you are bringing by giving your time cannot be overstated.

**The efforts of volunteers like you** are what makes it possible to reach out to the schools and provide them with needed support. Your work will provide opportunities and resources for the long-term educational advancement of children living on the outskirts of Granada. Any of the work you do, whether you are working directly with the children, or providing the support for those who do, is helping brighten the future of this developing country.

**Please take time** to read the orientation information provided here. It will give you an overview of La Esperanza Granada as an organization, as well as your role within it.

**You will have the ongoing support,** during your stay, of the *ayudantes* as well the Operations Director Pauline, and the support of all the other volunteers. The work to be done is both challenging and rewarding and can often feel like an emotional roller coaster. Sometimes you can be wondering if you are really doing anything of use at all – but **please remember that every single thing you do is something that is otherwise not done** – you will always be making a difference, however small it may feel at the time.

**Feel free to ask questions** We are a completely open organization and want to help you to become an effective and happy volunteer! This is what most benefits the children.



## LOCAL CONTACT INFO

Pauline's Cell Phone: 89138946  
Office telephone: 89342273  
(Country code when calling from overseas is 505)

## WHO WE ARE

**La Esperanza Granada started** with a few individual young travelers who said 'we can help'. Bill Harper who was the founder of the group said 'okay, I can show you a school that needs you'. That is how it all started, no long discussion groups, no grant writing etc., in fact at that time no real long term plans. The organization has evolved from that point.

At first this tended to lead the group all over the place, helping a little with this and a little with that, from trying to start small businesses to repairing roads, water systems, medical projects and many other things, though it always included the schools.

In 2004, as volunteer numbers started to grow, we sat down and examined our effectiveness and our focus. We looked at **goals that were both realistic and sustainable given the resources we have** – our major resource being you, the volunteers who come from all over the world.

**Priority for the future** we decided was **education**. When you go out into the schools and the communities, you will see many other areas of need. Some are needs that can only be met by long term professionals, local people who are a part of the culture; some are needs that can be best addressed at government to government level through large international aid agencies. Some are needs that are currently being helped by other organizations. We have decided as an organization that we can best help at our level, working in the schools and the communities to improve the future of the children through education. By **focusing your energies on what the organization as a whole is trying to achieve**, you can bring great and lasting benefit to the children.

**Currently** our work takes place in **primary schools**. This is where you will be working.

## WHAT WE DO

**Tutor in primary schools:** We work mainly with Kindergarten, grade one and grade two children, helping them with basics of learning to read, write and understand numbers.



**Art and craft classes in the schools:** The schools have few resources, we help to stimulate the children's imaginations and for the young ones, to develop manual dexterity, in classes where we provide the materials and show the children how to make things.

**Sports:** Both in school classes and after school sports training and competitions. We provide the resources and energy to help the children enjoy and benefit from sporting activities.

**Teaching English:** Our English teaching teams visit various schools and teach English classes twice weekly to children in grades three to six. (two or three volunteers work together teaching each class)

**Recess Club:** Each morning volunteers arrive at the schools before recess time and spend the recess (between 20 – 40 minutes varies) with interested children. Volunteers might chose to read, do puzzles, jump rope, throw a Frisbee, play a board game etc. This helps to encourage children to come to school each day as well as helping the children feel comfortable with the volunteers.

**Dental Care:** Volunteers take children to a dental clinic (approximately 40 children per week) and through donations, and the founders of the clinic, the children receive free dental care.

**Eyeglasses:** Each year volunteers do preliminary eye tests in all the schools where we work, and those children with problems are taken by the volunteers to visit an optician, and if necessary fitted with eyeglasses. Often severe problems can be avoided as these eye checks can catch things like parasites etc. before permanent damage is caused.

**Community reading programs:** Volunteers hold reading clubs in the schools one afternoon a week..

**School repairs and improvements:** All school repairs etc. have to be funded by the local communities. In the schools where we work the communities have no money. Through donations we have been able to install whiteboards, fans, new latrines, water tanks, repair roofs, repair desks and many other school repairs and improvements. Depending on the size and difficulty of the job we may use local labor or if we have capable volunteers we will do the work ourselves. Sometimes visiting groups of short term volunteers will paint a school, construct a cooking shelter, or take on repair jobs.

**Building schools:** In the past seven years we have added 11 classrooms to schools, completely renovated 5 classrooms, built a brand new six classroom school, built fences around four schools, and installed lots of swingsets in the schools. Projects such as this we do entirely with donations, and we pay local contractors to do the building.

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**Extra teachers:** Because the schools are underfunded often class sizes can be over 50 children to a class, or sometimes six grades to one teacher in a multigrade school. We contribute to the local Ministry of Education to pay the salaries of extra teachers each year.

## STRUCTURE

La Esperanza Granada is run by a Board of Directors to guarantee continuity. The original structure was set up when the organization started in 2002. Since then we have grown rapidly, and have stuck by our original mission of improving the long term future of the people through education.

Our Mission is set, but your ideas will be welcomed. Directors meetings are held monthly Any major spending or innovation needs to be discussed by the board! Operations Director Pauline is responsible to report to the board of directors, and responsible to keep the organization running within the aims of our mission statement.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- **Flor Sequeria**, president ([flor910@hotmail.com](mailto:flor910@hotmail.com)): has served as the president since LEGs inception.
- **Mark Turner**, vice president ([tbone1987\\_99@yahoo.com](mailto:tbone1987_99@yahoo.com)): who spends about half his time in Florida and half here in Granada. Mark has supplied the volunteer housing, and when in Granada is always supportive and willing to help in any way. He is also a major donor to the projects.
- **Pauline Jackson**, secretary ([paulineinnica@yahoo.com](mailto:paulineinnica@yahoo.com)): Also a full-time volunteer and the Operations Director of LEG.
- **Patricia Judith Alvarado**, a Medical Doctor who works with the Ministry of Health, brings valuable experience to our community health work, as well as adding the perspective of a young Nicaraguan woman who has completed her education here in Nicaragua and is a successful professional.  
**Xiomara Diaz**, co owner of the Garden Café here in Granada. Xiomara is a graduate from University of San Marcos, and grew up in Managua though her family origins are here in Granada.

We work with the **approval of the Ministry of Education**, but we are totally independent – not relying on any other organization, foundation, political or religious group. All funds are given by individual donors. All monies given are used wholly to support the schools and to support the community projects. No monies are spent on administration - all work being done by volunteers. Materials used in an administrative sense are privately paid for. Our resources are precious – the people in the pueblos have so little, please help by taking care of and conserving resources. The children will follow your example.



## Why Volunteers Are Needed and How We Help:

### **THE BIG PICTURE:** NiCaragua's main challenge is overcoming poverty.

One of every three children has some degree of malnutrition, which results in concentration problems for many of the children with whom we work. Adolescent pregnancies account for one of every four births nationally.

An estimated 85 per cent of primary-school-age children attend school. The quality and relevance of education are significant problems. It takes an average of 10.3 years to complete the mandatory six years of schooling, and only 29 per cent of children complete primary schooling.

### At A Glance Statistics of Nicaragua:

Population:	5.1 million
Below poverty line:	2.3 million
Literacy rate:	67-77%
% of population under 18:	53%

### What is a Volunteer?

- A representative of LEG
- A role model for the children

**A person who works and does not receive a salary.**

The education system may be regarded as 'out of date' or old fashioned. The teachers however work with few resources and very low pay. Large class numbers and the general poverty of the families whose children attend the schools add to their difficulties. Though they are poorly paid, teachers are held in high regard in Nicaraguan society, and it is important that we give them the same level of respect.

It is normal that we should show respect to our host country and to the Nicaraguan people. It is important to also show respect for the cultures of all the other volunteers. We speak common languages, but can often have very differing ideas and opinions. By working together cooperatively not only we can achieve more, and lasting friendships are often formed between volunteers.

When working in the schools please speak only in Spanish. If you really need to communicate something in another language with another volunteer, then first excuse yourself and then say what you need as briefly as possible. You may be



talking about what you plan to have for dinner, but a child, or a teacher may think you are passing comments about them.

## **Cultural Integration:**

Get out there and learn about your host country, and become more involved in the social reality. Remember, however, that you are not a local, and that there will always be differences in values and behavior that may cause disagreement or unease. You don't have to idealize or demonize your host culture—just try to understand it. You will probably find some elements in which you would like to participate, and others which you would prefer to avoid.

1. **Educate Yourself:** Research the history of Nicaragua.
2. **Manage Your Expectations and Set Reasonable Goals:** Whatever your main purpose in coming to volunteer – it is a good one. You may be here as you have always had a desire to help. You may be here for the benefit of your career experience, to learn Spanish, or simply to enjoy being part of a group of caring people. Whatever the reason, no single reason is better than another, you will get out of the experience what you put into it – and most volunteers take wonderful memories home with them.

## **Other fun and effective tips for cultural integration:**

1. Learn a local craft, song, or dance.
3. Eat meals and spend time out with local friends or coworkers.
4. Enroll in Spanish classes. The interaction and conversations with your teacher may provide important insight into Granadinos, Nicaraguan, and Central American culture.
5. Attend a local church or other religious institution, even if it's not your religion. Many congregations are very open to visitors.
6. Attend local concerts (Casa de Tres Mundos), plays, or sporting events.
7. Read the paper—a great way to practice Spanish and understand local current events. Watch the local news on TV. Shop at the market and ask questions about their goods.



## **POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **Orientation:**

We have planned that orientation of all new volunteers will take place on a Monday morning. To help with planning etc. take this into consideration when making your travel bookings. Please bring your passport along to orientation so that we can make a La Esperanza Granada I.D. card for you which will grant you discounts at some places. When you arrive you will be asked to complete a volunteer profile sheet with your passport details and emergency contacts.

### **Meetings:**

Volunteer meetings are held every Tuesday evening at 7.00 pm. This is more or less a social meeting though we ask that everyone attends, even if you can only stay a short while. At Tuesdays meetings new volunteers will be introduced, and any announcements made regarding days that the schools may be closed, or any other thing that would be likely to concern all volunteers. The Tuesday meeting too is an opportunity for volunteers from different schools to get together, as well as those who may not be staying in one of the volunteer houses.

### **Commitment and hours:**

The majority of volunteers will find that they start working in the schools after recess at 9.30am. Most of the younger children that you will be working with finish at 12am. After a break you are then going out in the communities to do community reading from 1:30pm to 3:30pm, Mondays to Thursdays. One afternoon a week you will help taking children from your school to the dentist or optician instead. Some of the other things you may be asked to do, help with twice weekly tours of a school and a village, help in a boys orphanage whose children attend one of the schools, doing community research, assisting in the office, organizing resources, helping with baseball, etc. Very occasionally you may be asked to help for a few hours on a Saturday, but this only happens three or four times a year. Normally weekends are free to travel, relax or whatever.

There are a lot of long weekends in Nicaragua too. When you do travel away from Granada it is wise to leave a note on the whiteboards in the houses as to where you are headed, just in case of any emergencies, natural disasters etc.

### **Taking time off:**

If you need to take time off for any reason please let the group you are working with know, including the ayudante in your school. If you need to take a few days off it is important to come and arrange it with us in the office as well as letting your co-workers know.

### **Office:**

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When volunteers are in the office, it is everyone's responsibility to talk to people coming in to find out more about the La Esperanza Granada. Try to be friendly and informative, the person who enters may be a prospective volunteer or a prospective donor, please help represent the organization in a positive way. You may be just waiting for your fellow team members, when the person working in the office may be in the middle of trying to write an important document, for example – so please, don't wait to be asked, and don't be shy, stand up, say 'hola' and tell someone what we are doing here. Be proud of what we are doing and encourage their interest.

Computers are expensive in Nicaragua and our computer resources in the office are limited. We have internet connection in each house and internet cafés are cheap. The computers and other resources in the office are not for personal use.

We have lots of school and teaching resources in the office. From professional journals on teaching to tips from past volunteers, lots of crafts and games ideas, books of drawings and worksheets that can be photocopied, craft materials, crayons, paints, story books, and all the things you might need to work with the children and learn more about how to. Feel free to come in and browse.

Any resources that are taken out of the office to use in the schools etc. or even for you to study in the house need to be written in a stock book in the office – and signed back in if it is a returnable resource such as a book.

The office is open from 9am to 5pm during the week.

## **Passports:**

Nicaraguan law states that all people must carry their identification at all times. For local people this means their Cedula ID card, for all visitors this means *carrying your passport*. The police have the right to detain you until your passport is produced. We suggest that while you are in Granada and going to the schools etc. that you carry a copy of your passport, but if you are traveling outside Granada for a weekend, visiting the beaches, the north etc. you will need to take your passport with you. Volunteers have been detained in the past, have incurred a lot of expense for taxi's for someone to bring their passport to another town.

## **Personal giving:**

Personal giving directly to children, teachers or others in the community is not encouraged. There are several reasons for this, firstly that our aim is to give a hand up, not a hand out. It can create dependency and jealousy, as the more popular or forward of the children may be given more. It may put the next volunteer who may have a different budget in an embarrassing position, when they are not able to give what you gave. A final reason, which applies in particular to people who ask you for money in the street, when you give them money you are showing them that they don't need to work to earn a living, but have the option of begging instead.



## **Accommodation:**

We have four houses available. You are under no obligation to stay in the volunteer housing, and in fact at times it may be fully booked. There are other options such as home stays in the city, monthly rates in hostels and private houses, and even houses or apartments to rent when it is for several months. We do ask however that you do not stay with families in the villages where we work. Aside from the potential social problems this can cause it can create an unsustainable financial dependence on volunteers as paying guests which does not fit with our aims of trying to help the long term improvement of the future of the villages. When you are not staying in the volunteer housing please be sure to put your address in Granada on the form you will fill in at orientation time, in case of emergency.

## **Volunteer housing – keys and rent**

For those staying in the volunteer housing, this housing has been provided by one of our directors to enable volunteers to stay more economically in Granada. Mark has provided the houses for volunteers to use, and has paid for all the renovations, furnishings etc., as well as ongoing repair. The house keys are your responsibility. The front doors have been fitted with locks that can be changed without replacing the whole lock, but if you lose your keys you will be asked to pay for all the new keys for the house as well as re-setting the lock. The rent is charged weekly from Saturday to Saturday. We pay the rent in four weeks in advance at the start of each month. You should bring your rent to the office, and get a receipt. Please be prompt with your rent. If you come during the month, please pay on arrival, if you are leaving before the end of a month, then pay only for the weeks you are staying. If you decide to move, for example to a home stay, or an apartment, you will need to give one week notice from a Saturday. The house rules are simple, no drugs in any of the houses, no pets, no other people to stay in the house except those paying rent for their space. Please follow the rules or you will be asked to leave the house.

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **HEALTH**

- Tap water is safe to drink in Granada, but not in many outlying areas. Don't forget, however, that many North Americans and Europeans have sensitive stomachs! If you have any concern, stick to bottled or purified water.
- Although there is no malaria in Granada, dengue fever sometimes is reported during the wet season. Always wear mosquito repellent in order to prevent this painful disease!
- Please be sure to wear sunscreen during your walk to and from schools and the villages. Also, bring water with you and drink lots of it to avoid dehydration.
- Should you fall ill while volunteering in Granada, we have access to a good bilingual doctor, Dr. Francisco Martinez Blanco, Clinica Piedra Boconoa. 552-5989

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- Give yourself plenty of time for rest and relaxation. Don't get burned out! This is a tough job, but a rewarding one. Be sure to appreciate that and to have fun while you are here. Visit the surrounding areas, enjoy the company of the other volunteers and local friends, and take plenty of time for yourself!
- There are a few common health issues people ask about, and a few common problems. It is important to drink enough water, quite a number of volunteers have had kidney infections from dehydration. Sometimes people don't drink sufficient water as they want to avoid having to use the latrine style toilets in the schools. In this climate you will need extra fluids. Another problem often results from people eating an excess of tropical fruit, particularly mangoes and papaya – because they are cheap and readily available here. Both are used in the tropics for their medicinal benefits, which means that they have strong properties, and can cause non specific intestinal problems when eaten in excess.

## **SAFETY**

- Please do not walk alone after dark, or anywhere after 10pm. There are lots of Taxis and they are cheap. It's better not to take the risk!
- Always be aware of your purse or wallet. Petty theft is common, but opportunistic. It is unfair to tempt poor people to become thieves due to your neglect. Don't carry things like your credit cards/ATM cards with you unless you need to use them that day – the same goes for carrying excess amounts of cash.
- Don't take shortcuts through unknown areas of town.
- **Use the same care in forming friendships and dating that you would at home.**

La Esperanza Granada asks that you act responsibly during your stay and that you treat all members of the Community with respect. Remember that you are a representative of the organization and your home country, as well as foreign presence in general in Nicaragua. Your actions will influence local opinions regarding each of these areas. We also want you to enjoy your time in Granada, happy people can help others, and helping others can make you happy.

La Esperanza Granada wishes your volunteering experience to be very rewarding. We appreciate your time and dedication to this organization and hope that the new professional and personal skills you will develop in this role will help you in your future working life.

**PAULINE JACKSON**  
**Operations Director**  
**LA ESPERANZA GRANADA**

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