



Volunteering for hands-on giving of hope

## La Esperanza Granada

by Pauline Jackson

Since the 1980s, the conditions of extreme poverty in a war torn country have led to a flow of volunteers from around the world visiting Nicaragua. Natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes increase the need for help and many international aid agencies have sent an ongoing stream of volunteer workers.

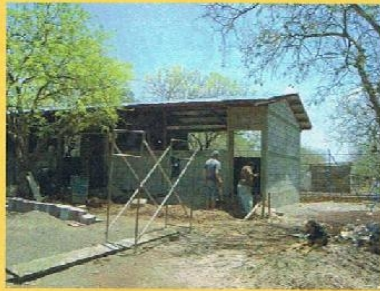
Along with major organizations like UNICEF, US Peace Corps, Microfinance Banks, etc. there are now a number of homegrown Nicaraguan volunteer organizations meeting local needs at the most basic level.

La Esperanza Granada is just such a group. Formed almost by accident in 2002 when a few young backpackers told a local hostel owner, "We can help," it has now grown to become a tremendous support to education in rural areas around Granada.

Each morning some 40 young, and not so young, volunteers leave town by bus, bicycle, or on foot to visit rural schools. Once there, they spend their time with the early grades, tutoring children one-on-one in the basic skills of reading, writing, and math.

Children from homes that are no more than wood and plastic shacks and whose struggling parents normally keep them busy with household chores – gathering firewood, looking after the younger ones, helping washing clothes, etc. – have the opportunity to get, through the volunteers, individual attention and encouragement in their first steps of learning.

Now, seven years on from the start, La Esperanza Granada – working entirely with volunteers (who don't pay any fees) and with unsolicited donations – has managed to build 12 much needed new classrooms, refurbished 8 others, built fences and playground equipment for schools, and paid the salaries of extra



teachers and a school nurse.

More than 70 children receive sponsorships to attend a high school in the City of Granada and 10 young people receive university scholarships to study on weekends, along with a stipend to work in the schools alongside the volunteers during the week.

Now working in eight government-run schools that are sadly under-funded, with the help and collaboration of other groups, the La Esperanza Granada volunteers have been able to take hundreds of children to dentists and to supply eyeglasses when needed. Around 1200 children have received prizes on International Children's Day, a day full of fun and games.

Children have been taken on excursions to visit the City of Granada for the first time. In a country where only an estimated 30% of children complete primary school, creating an interest in learning is vital to improving the opportunities for the impoverished youth of the rural areas.

British volunteer Molly Abraham said that it has been the most incredible experience to see firsthand how one can have such an impact on these children's lives. Ready to go home after three months in Granada, she has promised to remain an ardent supporter of La Esperanza and its goals to increase the amount of help they are able to give.



Australian Pauline Jackson, Operations Director for the past four years, says that the positive attitude of the volunteers and the willingness of people to contribute to an organization that uses none of the funds donated for administration are the keys to the success of La Esperanza Granada.

If you are visiting Granada, call into the office of this hardworking group on Calle Libertad, just one and a half blocks from Parque Central, one block north of Calle la Calzada. Twice a week, they take interested people to see one of the schools and rural villages. They also have bins in the office where you can drop off used clothing or school supplies. ➡

