



## Welcome to La Esperanza Granada

*[Please take the necessary time to read through this information. It is meant to help you avoid 'surprises.' You may wish to print a copy and bring it with you to refer to during your stay.]*

### **Introduction**

La Esperanza Granada's principle objective is to support the education of children in the poorest barrios of Granada. Volunteers have been working here in the schools and in the communities since we started in 2002, and this information is based on their experiences and feedback.

Working with children here can be fun, but hard work. On the up side, the children are warm, smiling and affectionate, open and trusting – on the down side it will be noisy, hot, dusty, inconsistent and challenging. There are two main areas where we work with children, in the local schools and in our learning centers. The first impression, especially in the school classrooms, is one of total chaos, but get through the first few days, and you will start to see how much the children appreciate your help. Patience and enthusiasm may be more important than teaching experience. We aim to raise their self-esteem, and stimulate interest in learning, if we can do that, the local teachers can achieve the rest.

It is important to keep in mind that Nicaragua has its own culture. It is not a 'poor European country' as it is sometimes thought of due to its history of European colonization, but uniquely "Nicaragüense". Therefore, we would like you to read through this information and use it to prepare thoroughly for your stay with La Esperanza Granada.

### **La Esperanza Granada - Terminology:**

**Schools:** The schools where we work are public schools owned and run by the Nicaraguan Government Ministry of Education – we don't have our own schools.

**Learning Centers:** Centers built by us and run by us, in the communities that most need them. (first learning center open in Dec. 2016, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> open in July 2017, more centers are planned for the future.

**Local University Interns (Ayudantes):** Local university students with sponsorships provided by individual donors that include a small stipend for their living expenses along with their school fees. To qualify for this program, which pairs a university scholarship with long term volunteer work, young Nicaraguans must have completed their high school education and be prepared to give approx 5 hours of their time each day to helping in the schools, the learning centers and our office. We affectionately call these interns who work in our office and the schools 'Ayudantes', which means helpers in Spanish.

**Volunteers:** People who come to work for La Esperanza Granada and don't receive any wages or material benefits. They receive smiles from children and the satisfaction of having helped in a meaningful way.



## **Very Important**

### **Meetings**

Volunteer meetings are held every Tuesday afternoon at 5.00 pm in O'Shea's Irish Bar Lounge and are mandatory for all volunteers. At the meeting, we introduce new volunteers, say goodbye to departing volunteers, and make any important announcements regarding the schools or volunteer work. The Tuesday meeting 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.

### **Safety**

- Please do not walk alone to the learning centers or the schools out in the barrios, or anywhere after dark even in town. There are lots of taxis and they are cheap. It's better not to take the risk! Don't take shortcuts through unknown areas of town.
- 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.

### **What to wear**

We ask all volunteers to wear their La Esperanza Granada t-shirts while they are working in the schools, the learning centers and our office. This helps the teachers, the students and the community to recognize that you are part of the organization, and not simply a stranger in the school or community. Knee length shorts, skirts or trousers are appropriate, and closed footwear is advised.

### **The Nicaraguan education system is not ours to change**

When you are working in the schools it is important to remember the education system may be very different from the one you're used to. We are not here to tell people 'our way' is better. We are there to help the local teachers, provide individual attention to the young students and to improve the infrastructure and resources of the schools where we can. In the learning centers we have much more freedom to do as we wish, but still within the confines of what is culturally appropriate.

### **Communication is important**

Communication between the local interns, the volunteers, the volunteer coordinator (Scarleth) and the Operations Director (Pauline) is crucial. If there are problems, frustrations, doubts or suggestions, please communicate in order to work things out.

***"The most important thing that you can do is to help the children feel special and important. One of the hard facts of being raised in poverty is lack of expectations and low self-esteem. Though you may not individually change the life of a child in a few weeks, you are part of a continuing stream of volunteers working with these students, and together we can truly change their lives."***



## ***Structure of the organization***

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 regularly. Any major spending or innovation needs to be discussed by the board. Operations Director, Pauline Jackson, is responsible to report to the Board of Directors, and to keep the organization running within the aims of our mission statement. You will find the list of our board members and their jobs at the end of this document.

### **Our Staff**

We have five employees at La Esperanza Granada: Karen Ocampo our administrator, Tatiana Areas our secretary, Scarleth Espinoza our volunteer coordinator, Ramón Salgado our computer technician and Justo Gonzales who works with groups, and teaching Spanish. All five began with us as local interns and spent several years with the organization before they were offered full-time employment. We have a policy of employing only local staff. You will find that all of our staff will try to answer your questions and will do its best to help you.

### **Volunteer Support**

The work you do as a volunteer can be very difficult and sometimes frustrating. The local teachers are qualified and are used to working in this educational system. You are not expected to become a fully qualified teacher during your time here. In fact, even if you are a qualified teacher elsewhere, this will be a totally different experience from your past teaching. When you are working with children in the learning centers you will have a range of activities to select from to help you engage the children and guide them in their learning, and of course you will have the opportunity to create your own resources too.

You will find that you and the other volunteers will experience ups and downs, which is to be expected given that this is such an intercultural experience. Talking about frustrations, doubts, or problems with other volunteers really does help since they go through the same difficult process you are experiencing.

You are fulfilling a very important role in the lives of the children you work with by offering them your full individual attention. Although it can take a long time to see the direct results from the work we do, the time you spend with these children adds a whole new dimension to their education. Every time you smile at a child, stop to talk with them, kick a ball for a few minutes, or say “well done,” you are making a child feel special.

All volunteers are encouraged to come to the office and talk to Pauline, the Operations Officer, Karen our administrator or Scarleth our volunteer coordinator, at any time. If you feel like you could be more useful in another team or you would like to change your role, please come and talk to us. We are always willing to help in order to make this experience better for you.



## ***About the Schools and the Learning Centers***

La Esperanza Granada started out working in one small school and has grown since, now working with over 2000 children in the barrios of Granada. The schools are situated in poverty stricken neighborhoods and are owned by the Ministry of Education, even schools we have built. The Ministry of Education grants us permission to go into the schools and help. The learning centers are in these same poor barrios and attract the same children who are attending the local schools.

### **The Academic Year**

The academic year runs from early February until the end of November. There are two terms with a one-week break in July. There are also numerous public holidays, teacher meeting days, etc. when there is no school or classes finish early. The learning centers are open year round. They will only be closed for public holidays, and along with the schools they will close the last Friday of each month.

***Note:** Often we get no notice that schools will close early for a meeting, or even close all day – the teachers also don't know until the last minute – it is one of the things about Nicaraguan culture that takes some adapting to.*

### **Meals in the schools**

The Nicaraguan government provides a supply of food to each school, to be delivered every few months. The food is prepared by some of the mothers either in the school or in their homes. Every child gets a meal at school during the recess period, for which they bring their own bowl and cup. Some children forget, and we keep a supply of plastic bags in the school to help those children.

### **Resources**

Thanks to donations we are able to provide a supply of classroom materials that are taken to the schools by the *local interns*. We have a record of all materials. Although it may not make a lot of sense to you, the strict control of materials and written record is required by Nicaraguan law. Each school has a resource cupboard that we put there, and your local intern will have the key. Check in your school what supplies are there for you to use, and feel free to come and browse the many books in the office. Many have ideas for activities, craft projects, teaching tips etc. and tutoring guides. In the learning centers you will find there are a lot of resources. Please help us make the best use of these by teaching the children to tidy up after use, to not waste, and to put resources back in the cupboards in their right place.

## ***Role of the Volunteers***

**In the Schools:** Most volunteers will be assisting the qualified local teachers by offering their help with either the entire class, working with small groups, or tutoring one-on-one. Giving the children a lot of individual attention helps raise their self-esteem and gives them the will and interest to learn. Volunteers teaching English will run their classes as a team.



As a volunteer, you work closely together with your *local intern* at the school, who will introduce you to the classroom teacher. Some of the teachers have worked with many volunteers before and had both good and not so good experiences with them.

We are helping some of the poorest schools in the country so we cannot expect the best teachers to work at these schools. However, it is not our place to criticize them! Instead we need to support them as much as possible.

It is important that you try to work with your classroom's teacher as much as possible, since this is the perfect way to find out what the main concerns are and which kids need the extra attention. However, please be aware that teachers may not always respond or may wait for some weeks before starting to really work with you. Be patient, calm, and respectful. They have a hard job to do.

## **English Teams**

Volunteers who teach English plan their lessons and conduct the classes with children in the last three years of primary school. English classes are compulsory in high school and the children are expected to have a basic level of English when they first attend. In comparison to private schools, where all children have English classes from an early age, the schools where we work do not have English teachers apart from our volunteers. The teachers and the Ministry of Education have asked us to teach English so that these children will have a better foundation from which to build if they do reach high school.

Each English team will have a local intern who works along with them, and normally will work in two schools per team.

The main objective is to give the children an interest in learning a second language and to help them get past the fear of speaking it. We want English classes to be engaging so that the children learn while having fun.

## **Physical Education and Art**

Sports and arts are two very important aspects of education. During recess there is always time to play games or do sports activities with the children. Arts and crafts stimulate the children's imagination as well as help them develop manual dexterity by using scissors, paintbrushes, crayons, etc. The time spent with the children is a valuable way of introducing different learning techniques, whether it's in the form of games, puzzles, songs, drawing or any other activities. We encourage volunteers to help teachers with ideas for craft and art projects with the supplies that we have available.

## **Eyeglasses**

When there are funds available, children with apparent eye sight problems are taken to visit an optician, and those that need eyeglasses are fitted for them. Often, severe problems can be avoided as these eye checks can catch parasites, infections, etc. before they cause permanent damage.

**In the Learning Centers:** The learning centers are designed to supplement and add to the children's time in the school classrooms. The aim is to provide resources for the children to learn, and have volunteers who will motivate and guide them. In the learning center you will be



working with small groups of children from all grades. The main areas are literacy, math, arts and crafts, and computers. With the younger children the computers are used as a learning tool for literacy and math through educational games.

In the homes most of the children have no access whatever to any type of learning materials, no computers, no books, no paper, crayons, pencils etc. Most do not have a table to do homework, or a place to sit and read/study. They are taught at home how to cut firewood with a machete, how to watch their baby siblings, how to tend the fire for cooking rice and beans etc., but not taught the basics of counting, alphabet etc..

You can make a positive impact by encouraging the children you work with to come each day (they receive merit points for attendance and good behavior which they can then „spend“ each month on things such as notebooks, crayons, pencils etc.). In the learning centers there is an opportunity to teach thinking things through, rather than simply learning by rote and memorizing, which is the main form of learning in the public schools.

The learning centers are large, airy and clean. They have been built to provide a safe, friendly place where the children can come and learn with the assistance of the volunteers and our local interns.

## **Eyeglasses**

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## ***Funding***

### **Admin Contribution**

The \$20 contribution that each volunteer makes (including groups that work on specific projects) pays for the salaries of our staff, our accountants who are government accredited and required by Nicaraguan law, internet in the office, office supplies, etc.

### **Donations**

We receive donations from many friends of the organization, future and past volunteers and their families and other interested people who want to help. We encourage donors to say how they would like us to use their funds. We also receive donations for high school sponsorships, and for university scholarships which support our local interns. *Below are some **projects** we work on with donated funds.*

## ***Special Projects***

### **Building schools**



In total, we have added 26 classrooms to schools, built a brand new nine-classroom primary school, and built a seven-classroom high school. Projects such as this we do entirely with donations, and we pay local contractors to do the building, except in the case of groups wanting to build who are willing to fund the project. We have build a 200 sq. m. Learning Center, and two more are under construction early in 2017.

## **School repairs and improvements**

Generally, all school repairs in Nicaragua are funded by the local communities, but in the schools where we work, the communities do not have the money to fund such repairs. Through donations, we have been able to install whiteboards, fans, new latrines, and water tanks, repair roofs, desks, and other material items, and in some cases, put in swings and gardens. Depending on the size and difficulty of the job, we may use local labor. If we have the number of capable volunteers needed, we do the work ourselves. Sometimes visiting groups of short-term volunteers will paint a school, construct a cooking shelter, or take on repair jobs, providing that they also bring the funds for materials.

## ***Volunteer housing***

The volunteer housing is self-supporting. Volunteer house contributions help pay for rent, water, electricity, Wi-Fi, cable, cleaning, repairs and maintenance, and the replacement of furniture and other necessities. No money from the housing is used by the organization, and no money from the organization is used for housing. If there is a shortfall in the money needed for the housing, one of our directors has privately contributed the funds. One of our directors also paid privately for all the original renovations and furnishings.



## ***Other Information***

### **Board of Directors**

- **Flor Sequeria**, president (flor910@hotmail.com): has served as the president since La Esperanza Granada's (LEG) inception.
- **Mark Turner**, vice president (tbone1987\_99@yahoo.com): 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**, treasurer (paulineinnica@yahoo.com): 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, and contributes her perspective of a young Nicaraguan woman who has completed her education here in Nicaragua and become a successful professional.
- **Xiomara Diaz**: secretary; 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 in Granada.

### **Links**

Our blog: <http://laesperanzagranada.blogspot.com/>

Our general Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/laesperanzagranada>

Facebook page for volunteers: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2328958861/>

***La Esperanza Granada highly appreciates your time and dedication to this organization and the Nicaraguan children. We wish your volunteer experience to be very rewarding and hope that the professional and personal skills gained from this experience serve you well.***