



NOTES FROM THE FIELD: COVID-19 AND HOGAR LUCEROS DEL AMANECER

Casa - Pueblito has partnered with Hogar Luceros del Amanecer for the past three years. Working with over 160 children and their families, the educational organization in Camoapa, Nicaragua, had to adapt quickly to the challenges presented by COVID-19. The following is an update from their director, Fabian Sebastian Laguna Rodriguez.

"I write to you from Hogar Luceros del Amanecer Foundation, a project that has been developing programs to protect and serve children and families in conditions of extreme poverty for the past 16 years.

Casa – Pueblito has been a bulwark for us for our integral assistance programs, with their collaboration and support for various educational projects that we have started and which have had a very important impact on the transformation of the living conditions of children who are beneficiaries of the project.

COVID-19 arrived in Nicaragua on March 18th, in Managua. In April, the first cases were detected in Camoapa. As the situation became more acute, we were obligated to suspend activities temporarily. As community contagion spread and the rate of infection increased, we changed the way we were delivering services to children and families, bringing them food and face masks home to home. We developed a daily monitoring system by telephone to know the health situation of children and their families, always ready and willing to help where we could. Our staff worked from home, but we always did what the situation allowed us to do – what we never did was abandon the children and their families in the hardest parts of the sanitary crisis.

The families and children that we work with, thankfully did not get sick. We were always reminding them of the pertinent recommendations about hygiene and preventative measures. The community in Camoapa was very worried – in some moments, everything was closed, included homes, with very few people in the streets and the city only functioning at half capacity.

Many families attended by the project lost their jobs, others had to move to other cities to look for work. The economic situation became extremely difficult for each and every one of the families.

Now the project is functioning with relative normality, and the city is returning to normal, as the situation is slowly becoming more and more controlled. Our students attend classes wearing their face masks and we continue to encourage preventative measures."

COMINGS & GOINGS AT CASA - PUEBLITO

Earlier this year, **Karen Dick**, our Office Manager here in Toronto, left to pursue another career. Although it was only to be a few months filling in, Karen stayed with us for many month's longer and we will be forever in her debt. She worked seamlessly and tirelessly with the board, the Managua staff and Lucero here in the office. Karen was a joy to have on the team and she will be sorely missed.

Marnie Saunders, has stepped down from the board of directors after many years of devoted service. She first joined the board of Casa Canadiense in March 2013 but had already been an active supporter and volunteer. She assumed the role of Board Secretary in early 2018 and continued with many roles in our various committees, in particular, the Brunch and Auction. In 2012, Marnie travelled to Nicaragua to see for herself the daily activities of life on the ground and most importantly, the results of the solidarity between Canadians and Nicaraguans made possible by your support. We cannot thank Marnie enough for all she has given (she will remain an active supporter) and we wish her all the best in the next adventure in her life. Abrazos Marnie!

Brian Whittaker also departed due to conflicts with his job. His contribution to our events, before and after joining the board have been magnificent. Always with a smile and a willingness to contribute, Brian's participation has been one of immense positivity.

And **Brenda Holtkamp** has returned to the fold. Her years of actively engaging and leading students to Nicaragua, her tireless efforts volunteering for everything and anything and her compassion and commitment to social justice is more than any organization could wish for.

And now, we have two new amazing individuals joining us on the board to bring new energy and fresh perspectives. **Corinne Bulger** is completing her final semester at McGill University with majors in Gender, Sexuality, Feminism and Social Justice and a minor in Indigenous Studies. She returned in March from Santiago, Chile where she had been living and studying on a language fellowship. She has taken on a number of leadership roles both at McGill and in her community and has been recognized numerous times for her contributions. Stepping in to take over the role of Board Secretary is **Catherine Walker**, presently working as a Senior Project Manager/Consultant with the Mennonite Economic Development Associates. Her commitment to international development has taken her to Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru, Columbia and Spain. She has experience with the workings of Global Affairs Canada and managing large programs. Her years of experience with not only on the ground management, but a solid background in fundraising and grant writing bring to the table many strong attributes much needed in the world we operate in. It is with great pleasure and enthusiasm that we welcome Corinne and Catherine to Casa - Pueblito!

A NOTE FROM OUR COUNTRY DIRECTOR



Six months ago, the world shifted dramatically for all of us with the arrival of COVID-19. My life was no exception. Within the span of three days of Justin Trudeau's announcement that all Canadians living abroad should come back to Canada, I had packed a suitcase and done as much as I could to prepare to leave the Casa in Managua, my home for the past four years, for an unknown period of time.

I arrived back in Canada just as the international border was shutting down. Picking up my suitcase from the one open carousel at Pearson International was a surreal experience. I was able to make my way back to Nova Scotia to stay with my folks and wait for what came next.

I continued the work for Casa – Pueblito, keeping in touch with our office in Managua as well as our community partners. The stress of watching the pandemic rage across Canada was compounded by watching it arrive in Nicaragua as well, worrying about my community there, and the uncertainty of not knowing when I'll be able to return. I watched our community partners adapt their projects to the best of their ability, closing when necessary, and delivering food packages to vulnerable community members. "Zoom fatigue" is one thing that we

all understand after working from home for months. One of the hardest parts of the past six months has been not getting to visit and spend time with the folks in our communities. The relationships are, and have always been, what makes this work worth it – I can only hope to return to Nicaragua and the communities that have considered me part of their families soon.

In the meantime, our Toronto office has been continuing on with our work. Our bookkeeper, Emieke, and I, meet weekly to discuss what's been going on. These meetings have been a lifeline over the summer. We ran a successful Film Night in July, and seeing how many people came out (virtually) to support us during what have been tough times for all was truly life-giving. I've also been keeping in touch with our office in Managua. Darling, our housekeeper and my close friend, recently had to undergo surgery for chronic health problems. Thankfully she's recovering well, and we've been doing what we can to support her in her recovery from afar. As we pass the six month mark of this crisis, I am reminded that "hope is a discipline" (in the words of Mariame Kaba). And hope is in the doing. As I continue to work with the incredibly committed Casa – Pueblito team (staff and board of directors) to provide services and programming to our partners in Nicaragua, things seem a little less bleak. And I'm glad to be spending time on the East Coast crafting, cooking, and baking while I await my return to Managua.

In solidarity,
Ashley Rerrie

Photos above and below: students from Hogar Luceros del Amanecer in Camoapa.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Carl Melvin | President
Bill Heffernan | Vice President
Daniel Wong | Treasurer
Catherine Walker | Secretary
Michael O'Sullivan | Staff
Liaison
Kathleen Saunders
Kathleen Ware
Ken McGuffin
Brenda Holtkamp
Corinne Bulger

TORONTO STAFF

Lucero Tsui | Administrative Assistant
Emieke Geldof | Bookkeeper

MANAGUA STAFF

Ashley Rerrie | Country Director
Elizabeth Guillen | Administrative Assistant
Darling Huerta | House & Office Attendant
Ángel Silva & Daniel Zeledon | Security



CONTACT US IN CANADA

107A - 2238 Dundas Street West
Toronto, ON M6R 3A9
Telephone: (416) 642 - 5781
Email: info@casapueblito.org

CONTACT US IN NICARAGUA

Residencial El Dorado, Casa Nº 326
De donde fue la casa de las bromas 5
cuadras al lago Managua, Nicaragua
Telephone: (505) 22 49 55 42