

Developing Human Potential

Los Niños is a non-profit organization with 27 years of experience working in the United States-Mexico border region. In the formative years the work was charitable in nature, focused on addressing basic needs of low-income families and groups in Mexico. What was learned during those years was that, by engaging in a strategy of only providing basic material goods, the participating families and children had no opportunity to change the context in which they were living. Los Niños began to see that, by organizing groups in the communities and providing them simple educational opportunities, a shift in knowledge provoked a change in attitude followed by changes in practice. This has created a lasting change in consciousness about what is possible.

In the course of developing the community activities, Los Niños has always hosted students from all over the United States to experience and participate in these community development initiatives. The development education/service learning program of Los Niños serves hundreds of students each year expanding their awareness of the realities of poverty and the opportunities available to work in the arena of community service.

Women and children involved in Los Niños educational programs learn basic information about health, nutrition and organic agriculture. These courses are only the vehicle to organizing the participants, developing their awareness about needs in their communities and creating opportunity for them to be leaders in addressing those needs.

Los Niños has developed a cadre of highly organized community women (promoters) who are now taking the reigns of leadership in their communities to address basic needs. One participant commented, "I know what to feed my children, I need more income to provide for that". Los Niños has, under development, a micro-loan program to enable women stay in their neighborhood and run their own mini-business, usually from their home. This includes selling self-produced products such as honey, food items, and products for daily use.

The women have discovered ways to organize and address the needs of more than just their own children. In Colonia Hidalgo, the women organized their effort, secured a loan from Los Niños (now repaid) to purchase kitchen equipment and prepare a kitchen space. They are now serving several hundred

meals to children in the nearby school. This effort serves to offer employment to the women, and address the poor nutrition of the children in the school: Over 50% of the children were coming to school with no breakfast.



Now this group is calling for the opportunity to expand and formalize their education. Los Niños is working with the Ibero-Americana University in Tijuana to bring the university to the community. Sites have been selected and a curriculum designed to provide for basic education where the participants can secure their primary and secondary school credentials while honing their skills in community development. The program calls for each participant to design, implement and evaluate a community based project.

Many of the United States students that participate in the Development Education program of Los Niños return home transformed by the experience. They write to us about changing their life path to be more in the service of others. Here again, we see the need to formalize this program to be able to provide a credentialed program that will offer them more opportunity to engage in a professional path of service and leadership.

How to proceed? What is needed?

Los Niños has followed a participatory community development methodology to develop the organized and powerful group of community promoters who are serving as change agents in their communities. They gather monthly and share ideas, organize their outreach, learn new material and constantly assess and change the existing materials to better serve their communities. The mission of Los Niños is:

"To improve the quality of life by creating opportunities for children and their families to discover their human potential through participation in the development of the community."

Priority programs include:

Community Development Education. The planning process for Los Niños is designed in such a way to call forth the leadership and stewardship of all constituencies: community members, staff and board. To be in keeping with the principles of subsidiarity and uplifting the practice of local decision-making, we currently see the need for the creation of a strong, local Mexican organization, designed and governed by those closest to the identified needs. This organization will become an Institute for Community Development, offering diplomas in community service, health, nutrition and organic agriculture. As well, the Institute will offer a credentialed program for U.S. students to learn about the realities of poverty and acquire skills in community development strategies. Los Niños has entered into a collaborative relationship with Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada and the Ibero-Americana University of Tijuana to create the credentialed educational pro-

LOS NIÑOS

The Voices

Voices from the Board of Directors

By Joan Bryden

Community Outreach and Friendship Across the Border

In July of 2000, I had the opportunity to host 13 Los Niños Promotoras and staff in our Port Clinton, Ohio home, for an educational exchange with Terra Community College located in Fremont, Ohio. Thanks to the commitment to diversity and the support of Terra's President, Dr. Charlotte Lee and Dean of Community Development, Scott Epstein, the Promotoras took many new skills and ideas back to Mexico to share within their own communities.

The Promotoras' days were filled with up to 6 hours of classroom training, evenings of homework, and immersion into a community quite different than their own. The weekends were spent laughing, dancing, boating on Lake Erie, shopping, touring the city of Port Clinton, doing more homework, making crafts, and laughing some more!

Marion McLaughlin not only drove from Buffalo, New York, bringing delicious meals for several days, but also attended classes and helped with homework! Local Port Clinton merchants donated lunches for many class days. The Promotoras went to Knipp's Farm, a large

local farm where they visited and brought an authentic lunch to the migrant workers in the field. They were served dinner at "Teacher Paula's" home, had a tour of Small Business Coordinator & Analyst, Bill Auxter's printing company where he and his wife, then took them on a walking tour throughout the town of Fremont. The Promotoras prepared food for a Fiesta for all their new friends, and were even given the Key to the City of Port Clinton by its Mayor Tom Brown!

At the end of the two weeks, the Promotoras participated in a graduation ceremony where they received Certificates of Completion from Terra Community College as well as a promise of continued participation between the college and Los Niños.

Thanks to our wonderful Los Niños Board members, Ralph & Cheryl Broetje, Bill & Marion McLaughlin and Elena Rauen for helping to sponsor the Promotoras' Educational

Exchange. Nothing can tell the story like those who participated:

"The presentation of Diplomas, and gifts, all was beautiful in those moments, I felt like flying or being in the clouds!"

-Promotora Gloria Urbina Olguin

"These classes, studying in a

University are a dream that has no ending. I have recorded in my mind, and heart of all the persons that intervened. They were days that I never imagine to have lived them."

-Promotora Maria Luisa Garcia Hernandez

"The computer classes were very good, something of a good feeling that I felt, that never in my life I would have ever gone to a University or College to study in the United States. We had the opportunity to do it. They gave us a recognition on behalf of Terra Community College.

This is very valuable and important for me because it motivated me to continue to prepare myself more."

-Promotora Ixchel Galaviz



Promotoras

By Maria de los Angeles Luna

"I think that all of us are like a little box that contains a lot of treasures, a little box that contains many things that we can offer. But if the box is closed, those treasures will not come out.



The beauty is to open those treasure boxes we carry inside and share them with those around us, share all the experiences and knowledge we carry inside."

—Maria de los Angeles Luna, Community Outreach worker for eight years, recently completed her primary school education and represented Los Niños at the UN Conference on Women in New York, June 2000.

Welcome to New Board Member Mayor Tom Brown



Last fall Board member Joan Bryden invited Tom Brown, Mayor of the City of Port Clinton, to visit Los Niños programs. After a whirlwind tour of nutrition, gardening and construction projects, the Mayor knew that he could offer much to Los Niños and the people of the border region. Tom, Joan and Scott Epstein of Terra Community College organized a program for Los Niños participants to visit Ohio. (see related story)

Los Niños invited Tom Brown to continue his involvement as a member of our board of directors. His many years of service in education and his current commitments as a board member of Terra Community College are great talents and connections for Los Niños. Tom is also very engaged in leadership development work -- empowering individuals to be of service and this is what Los Niños is all about.

Tom Brown is very active and personable — he has already opened doors for us in the political arena by contacting Mexican President Fox!

Mark Your Calendars Today!

Los Niños' 3rd Annual Bi-Cultural Exchange
June 20-25, 2002

Join this year's facilitators, Joan Bryden and Tom Rusch, in an exciting cultural exchange in Mexico!

Participants will stay at the Los Niños Center in the heart of Tijuana, Mexico. Each day they'll go into the communities (colonias) for interaction with Promotoras and their families. They'll be fully immersed in the Mexican culture, working hand in hand on service learning projects. All the while sharing in the exchange of ideas and experiencing both the programs and the progress Los Niños and its people have made over the many years.

This is Los Niños' major fundraising event of the year. Please join us for a fun-filled adventure, or consider sponsoring a family member or friend! For more information please contact the Los Niños office at 619-426-9110.



Of LOS Niños

Voices from Development Education

By Andy Schaefer

Each year thousands of families from various regions in Mexico and Central America migrate to the San Diego-Tijuana border in search of a new life. Tijuana is the fastest growing city in Mexico, with over 1,000 individuals arriving on any given day. Due to this influx of people, the government is unable to offer adequate educational facilities for the children of Tijuana. Faced with no other alternative, communities raise funds themselves and begin constructing much-needed classrooms. With the assistance of visiting groups, Los Niños offers communities even greater financial and physical support to continue the building of classrooms and other improvements at each school. Our work directly affects nearly 8,000 Mexican children annually and continues to expand each year.

In the past year, the Los Niños Development Education Program hosted approximately 600 U.S. students from across the country participating in community-directed projects. These students also witnessed, through experiential learning, the complexity of the San Diego-Tijuana border. One student commented that, "in each of my three experiences working with Los Niños, I have walked away with a renewed sense of the human spirit, a special view of what community can be, and a conviction to continue educating others on the uniqueness of the border region."

Many groups that have visited Los Niños have partnered with Escuela Martin Bautista, a school that Los Niños has been working with since 1999. Since that time, the community, with the collaboration of visiting groups, has built six classrooms, a teacher's office, a civic plaza, a storage facility and sidewalk access to all of the buildings. The community's tireless efforts have received the attention of the Mexican government. In June, the local government agreed to furnish

a completed computer classroom with twenty computers, software and a computer instructor. Since June, the community has finished the construction and is now receiving the computers.

Los Niños is proud to partner in projects with individuals who take such an active role in the development of their communities. In addition, the transformative interchange that occurs with visiting groups is eye-opening and in many cases life-changing. One student characterized her experience by stating that, "I thought we came to help these people build foundations, and what happened is that they built my foundation."

It is clear through our partnerships with various schools throughout Tijuana and the United States, that Los Niños is promoting community development through service-learning education. By our strong commitment to improving the quality of life along the U.S.-Mexico Border, Los Niños is both empowering U.S. students to make change while simultaneously assisting the poorest of the border region in their community-initiated, community-led work projects to improve educational opportunities in their area.



Continued from front cover

gram to be implemented in the community.

Micro Credit Program. There is a need to develop and formalize a loan fund for women entrepreneurs to develop income producing activities that include community kitchens and daycare centers. Also, many women are creating self-produced items such as tamales or pastries and are seeking ways to receive a small amount of capital to help them produce larger quantities and market their wares in the community. In Mexicali, a group of community members secured a loan to purchase beehives and produced 200 liters of honey their first harvest. A committee of women will determine which projects receive funding and the committee will monitor and manage the funds disbursed. This includes providing the workshops and training necessary for the women to learn certain accounting, management and computer skills. Los Niños currently works in over 20 communities, most of which need these services. The women clearly state that learning about nutrition and ecology is only the beginning. They need ways to generate income and have the opportunity to stay in

their community and care for their children. This program initiative requires setting up accounting systems, formalizing the technical assistance and in a sense creating a "bank" in Los Niños.

Community Infrastructure Fund.

There is also a need to develop a community infrastructure fund to provide construction materials in support of the creation and/or improvement of community kitchens, daycares, community centers and schools. Community members and/or the loan committee determine which projects will receive funding. This is a process where border communities engage with visiting groups and work side by side, sharing culture and labor while improving the community environment. More than 600 U.S. students participate in these activities each year.

Family Health and Nutrition. Los Niños continues its foundational work with 50+ outreach workers in more than fifty communities in Mexicali, Tijuana and San Diego. The family health, nutrition and ecology through organic production classes are offered twice a year and more than 3000

participants acquire recipes and tools to better feed themselves and their families. Taking into account that the participant's family members are also impacted, the program extends to 17,000 people each year. A key element in the program is to address child nutrition in the schools. In Mexicali alone, over 1000 primary school age children are assured a balanced breakfast through Los Niños encouragement of community women preparing meals in the schools.

Los Niños' programs are built from the ground up, calling on the people themselves to identify needs and address community concerns. From the early beginnings, Los Niños has focused on the concern that children along the border often do not have enough to eat. Now Los Niños continues that theme and promotes self-reliance and local decision-making while extending Los Niños outreach, creating more leaders and consciousness in the arena of community development and service.



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Executive Director, Elisa Sabatini

This September our view of what is so, and how things work, shifted. Humanity is currently going through a huge change in consciousness and perception.

The Mayan civilization, extending through southern Mexico and Central America, developed one of the most accurate calendars on the planet. It has never erred. They actually have 22 calendars in total. The Mayan fifth world finished in 1987. The sixth world starts in 2012. So we are currently "between worlds". This time is called "the revealing." The Mayan sixth world is actually blank. This means it is up to us to start creating the new world as we know it is supposed to be:

- *We know that we are supposed to live in peace.
- *We know that we are supposed to create unity and this happens through relationships.
- *We know that education decreases poverty.
- *We know no one should go hungry.

Los Niños wants to be part of the Mayan revealing. Creating a world with systems that support how the world is supposed to be. People need to unite, transcend borders, and live together as a human community. To do this, we must move past our fears and reach out to our neighbors.

There is great need along the US/Mexico border. I ask you to partner with us to address issues of poverty in this very complex region and at this very complicated time. Step out of time and envision with us a world without borders, interconnected with a focus on the well being of children everywhere.

Blessings to you,

Elisa Sabatini

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