

CDA News: Summer 2005



Circulo de Amigas street front services. As anyone can see, it is a gathering place and a focus of the community.

Photo: Dave Crockard.

Circulo de Amigas does all THAT?

The real answer, of course, is that Circulo de Amigas does too much to list. The beauty is that it is also flexible enough to react to need as it changes. So, in addition to supervising the education and health of 100 girls, thanks to our student sponsors, CDA does so much more. For example, here is a summary of the OTHER activities at CDA for the first quarter of 2005:

Psychological screening: CDA provided 55 sessions to scholarship students and their mothers. This component is still in its initial phase, which consists of evaluating the patients. Later, Psycho-social therapy will be offered to those who need it. Evaluations have already allowed CDA to do better follow up to students' academic performance.

Volunteer Program: Scholarship recipients and their mothers contributed a total of 540 volunteer hours towards organizing and performing:

- Tutoring: the best students assist those with difficulties
- Dance Group Practices (scholarship students)
- Support provided by the mothers to organize celebrations
- Organize teams to watch over the CDA's facilities Saturday & Sunday nights
- Construction of a Public Restroom in the CDA's facilities
- Organize cooking classes for students
- Revise CDA Library's inventory.

Círculo de Alfabetización: CDA continues providing literacy classes. The current course being taught at the literacy program is equivalent to 5th and 6th grades. 17 students were initially enrolled, later increasing to the current 22 students attending.

Library: During the month of March, the CDA library opened its doors to the general public. Also, a computerized system was installed for better management of the library's inventory and to provide a faster, more efficient and more convenient service.

CDA'S Clinic: During this reporting period the CDA clinic provided a total of 1,264 medical appointments, assisting an average of 421 patients per month. Out of the total of patients assisted, 86% were women, 36% were people between 21 and 30 years old, and 18% were children under 5 years of age; all from the poorest neighborhoods of Jinotega.

Your donation does so much:

- *Student scholarships keep girls in school and contribute to the health and welfare of the entire family*
- *Donations may be made to a specific aspect of the program or to the general fund, and are critically important to the community*
- *All paid staff members are Nicaraguan. This is an extremely effective method of doubling the value of donations by providing employment and demonstrating the value of education, and by providing role models.*



Students work on crafts in the room that serves as both for the Library and other activities at CDA.

Photo: Richard Crosier

A Strong Foundation for CDA

Text by Mark Tabbert Photography by Dave Crockard

Pat McCully is the bravest person I know. I met Pat through a study group we both attended. When I heard about Círculo de Amigas I wanted to learn more. Along with Dave Crockard, who speaks a little Spanish and could get us cheap tickets, I was off to meet Pat in Nicaragua and spend time visiting CDA.

Today it is relatively easy to travel to the backcountry of Nicaragua. Much easier than when Pat first went in 1986. At that time she knew no one. Bullets were flying within miles of where she first set up "camp". The small farming community she first lived in is just a few homes along the highway with virtually no commercial activity or services. Her outhouse was across the main highway some distance from her house. Dirt floors, no glass in the windows, tin roof, nothing we'd call home.

To travel to Pat's Nicaraguan home now is to travel to a haven for visitors and for the local community. Pat has built a compound filled with activity, learning, and life. A pharmacy, a clinic, and a community meeting room at the back of the property provide much needed medical services, and, in the evening, a place for large gatherings of women who are learning to read and write. Above these rooms is a comfortable apartment with screens on the windows, and good mattresses, sort of a B&B for visitors.

In the main building there is a library stocked with books, art materials and learning aides; a kitchen and separate eating area, one and a half baths, and two offices for the staff. A large empty room is used for a variety of purposes, not the least of which is to teach dancing, both traditional and modern dance. These are very popular with the girls. We saw a group perform at a Habitat for Humanity blessing of the keys ceremony. Their faces shone with great pride as they danced for the assembled group.

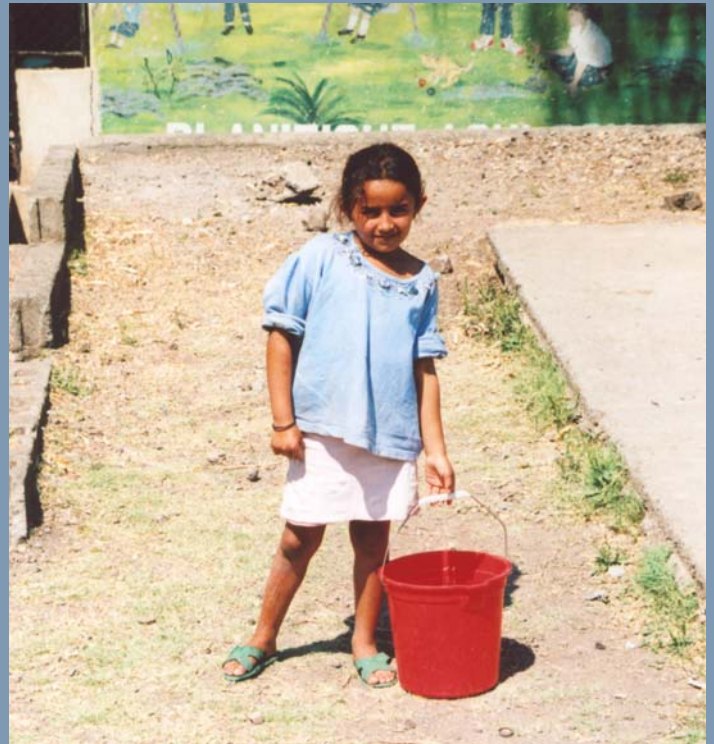
Behind the buildings is a playground with a large swing set and a half court basketball court. It's the only playground in the barrio. Kids are there all the time. The kids in the neighborhood have developed a soccer game of sorts that they play for hours on end. The swing set serves as the soccer goal.

They all love soccer. The kids had a field

across the street, but while we were there a bulldozer came in and laid out 3 new streets where housing will replace the soccer field.

Action is the name of the game, however, and so we accompanied Pat and Fanny Morales, the on-site CDA Director, to meet with the mayor about the loss of the soccer field. The Mayor interrupted a city council meeting attended by a hundred people to meet with us. Kids need a place to play, we argued. You can see evidence of how youth with nothing to do start creating a negative influence in the neighborhoods. The Mayor promised Pat a field if we (CDA) would help. Pat said we would. We all felt we could find some money for such a worthwhile project. A soccer field would be a good investment and provide a positive outlet for kids.

Another community project that took form while we were in Jinotega was a tree planting. Immediately upon arriving we noticed how barren the hillsides were in many places. The land that once served the people now is controlled by large ranches and is used



Neighborhood children haul water for the newly planted trees. CDA applied for and received a grant of trees as part of a reforestation project during our visit.

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to raise cattle. The people in turn are forced higher into the hills where they clear trees to farm and to sell as fuel. All the valuable trees are gone. Left are some trees that are more like a collection of vines that grow together and resemble a tree. We commented on the barren hills when we arrived and said we should find a nursery and plant a tree at CDA.

Idea into action, off we went to city hall at Pat's suggestion. We learned that there is a struggling reforestation effort going on. After some political maneuvering, we were approved for a grant of 17 seedlings to be delivered the next day. The foresters came as promised. Then, with the assistance of more than 30 neighborhood children, holes were dug in rocky ground, endless water was hauled, and by the day's end, all 17 trees were safely planted all over the property. If they survive, and some will, they will provide some much appreciated shade.

Walking in the neighborhood with Pat provides a great deal of evidence of just how many people she has touched through her efforts. She is invited into homes and greeted warmly wherever we go. There are what seem like 6000 little cabs that swarm around



This field was cleared and three new streets laid out during our visit, depriving the neighborhood youth of one of the few places of recreation. We felt strongly that a place to play is important for the young people and helps keep them busy.



Tree planting took many hands, but there were many hands lent.



Jinotega. Every driver knows the way to CDA. We were extended special respect throughout our visit just because we were associated with CDA. Pat, with the help of CDA sponsors has done a lot for this little community, and perhaps better yet, has laid a solid foundation for doing even more.

I have one last thought that might surprise you: this is certainly what we would call an impoverished community, and yet people are happy and smiling. There is a lot we can do to help this community, but there are lessons we can learn from these citizens of Jinotega about what it means to live in a community.

Mark Tabbert is a contributor to the CDA General Fund, and visited CDA in early 2005 along with his friend Dave Crockard, without whom the trip would not have been possible.

If you possibly can, plan a trip to meet your student. They feel so honored; and you will experience their reality. CDA can put up as many as four in a party at one time. A very minimal fee is charged: just \$10 a night per person including simple meals. We even have flush toilets now!
--Pat McCully--

Donations:

Circulo de Amigas
10583 La Fuente
Fountain Valley Ca 92708
CDA is a 501(c)(3)
organization under Internal
Revenue Service tax code.
CDA is operated in
Nicaragua by CEPS (Centro
de Estudios y Promoción
Social).

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Puhleez

*send photos of
yourself to your
godchildren. It makes
you real to them.*

From Pat's Pen

Important Information for all our Student Sponsors:

I know there has been some frustration in getting information. In order to help remedy this, here is a list of the best contacts. Please be patient. There is no Internet service in the office in Jinotega, and the levels of English vary, so it can take time. However, everyone is eager to help you get the information you need.

Front line in Jinotega: **Fanny Morales**, our CEO on site, is not fluent in English, but she is studying, and getting better daily. The office phone is 011 505 78-23-743. Remember that it is 2 hours later than California time, and that they are at lunch from noon to 1:30 their time. E-mail is circuloamigas@yahoo.com. **Isabel Cruz** is Fanny's second in command, and knows just about every detail about the sponsored girls.

In Managua: Financial matters are best handled by calling the CEPS office. **Isabel Arguello** (pcimonet@ibw.com.ni) is quite fluent in English. **Olga Munguia** (olga_munguia@hotmail.com, not fluent, but learning) is the most knowledgeable about where the accounts stand. **Dr. Leonel Arguello**

(leonel@ibw.com.ni) is the president of CEPS and is very fluent in English, but is out of the office a lot.

Stateside: Our treasurer (and a sponsor) is **Clover Behrend** who can be reached at 714 968-3029, after work, and by email at behrend1@pacbell.net. She can answer questions as to when and if checks have been received. Checks will be deposited weekly.

Checks should be made out to:

Circulo de Amigas
10583 La Fuente
Fountain Valley Ca 92708

Of course I am always here as last resort, and will continue my yearly visits, and as far as possible bring back stories of the young ones, with pictures for the newsletter.

Pat McCully

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*Please file this detailed info where
you can find it. You're bound to need
it at some time in the future.*



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