



# Raíces y Ramas

## Roots & Branches

### OUR MISSION

Planting Hope serves communities in Nicaragua and the U.S. by enhancing educational opportunities, supporting grassroots initiatives and fostering cultural exchanges.

**544,000**

Flight miles Planting Hope delegates flew this year

**2,924**

Pounds of donations carried to Nicaragua by delegation members

**1,830**

Hours of volunteer work in Nicaragua by delegation members

**540**

Nights volunteers and delegates stayed with Planting Hope homestay families



*Yannah Ziegler and first-grade students at San Marcos de Apatite.*

### STOWE STUDENT MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE FOR NICARAGUAN KIDS

**Y**annah Ziegler, a Stowe High School junior, had no idea that when she began planning for her trip with Planting Hope to Nicaragua, along with 17 of her classmates, that her fundraising efforts would help make it possible for the preschoolers at San Marco de Apatite to have a teacher for a year.

Yannah, hosted a craft fair at Stowe High School last December to help offset the cost of her trip, but instead used the \$500 to help supplement the salary for preschool teacher Zorayda Gonzalez.

Gonzalez teaches in a remote community near other schools that Planting Hope supports, providing materials and a livable wage for this important work. Government salaries for preschool teachers are around \$21 per month. Planting Hope provides an additional \$40 in scholarship funds for these teachers to offer them a more livable wage.



# DEAR SUPPORTERS OF PLANTING HOPE,

The last six months have been very busy ones for us. With nearly 70 people visiting Nicaragua during the last six months, our staff was busy planning, preparing for and executing a wide assortment of day trips and volunteer activities for delegation members ranging in age from an elementary student to those who are retired. In addition to receiving these visiting volunteers, Planting Hope also maintains our regular programming, including operation of La Chispa Library, the Mobile Library for Peace, Coffee Camps, supplemental school meals program and our microbusinesses.

This issue of our newsletter is dedicated to our *jóvenes*, or young adults, both in Vermont and in Nicaragua. This year we have hosted a record number of high school youth from Vermont — 35 during three separate trips. We continue to offer awe-inspiring experiences for young people in Vermont, truly broadening their perspective on the world, and we are able to do this at an age where they will use what they learn to make a difference in the world in the future.

This year, we added a new facet to our cultural exchanges. We recruited 20 high-school students from San Ramon into our youth shadow program, so that they could share their daily lives with



*Union Elementary's Sydney Dunn, second from left, with her host sister Marcela and host cousins on the San Ramon Elementary playground on shadow day.*

teens from Vermont. This experience was noted as one of the most meaningful, both for the Vermont delegates, as well as for the Nicaraguans, who opened up their homes, classes and lives for the day and were able to confirm what is universal about being a teenager in the world.

The delegations that visit Nicaragua not only fulfill our mission of cultural exchange, but also generate income to pay Planting Hope's expenses. However, even with an increase in funding from delegations, this year, our number of individual

donors has dropped. Although Planting Hope depends upon a wide assortment of funding, including corporate and foundation grants and earned income from our microbusinesses and delegations, at the heart of our fundraising activities are the contributions of our individual donors.

As many of you know, Planting Hope is constantly evolving and growing. Just as our programming in Nicaragua has expanded, so has our programming here in the United States. As we work our way into summer, we are increasing our fundraising activities and events, but we still need your support to make sure Planting Hope can continue the work we do both in Nicaragua and the United States.

Thank you for keeping Planting Hope in your charitable giving.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Merrill  
Founder & Executive Director



*Vermont and Nicaragua students and staff pose in front of the Pacific Ocean on the vacation days of their delegation.*

*After my trip to Nicaragua, I have a new appreciation for other cultures and the simplicity of life in other places of the world.*

—Ashley Raymond, April delegation member from Stowe High School



Nicaraguan shadow student's and Vermont teens from the April delegation pose for a shot after an afternoon of swimming at Cascada Blanca.

*Yannah calls it a 'small contribution,' but in the U.S., \$500 is a pretty significant amount of money for a high-school student to come up with. In Nicaragua, it goes even further.*



Yannah Ziegler and student

**HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT**, from page 2

“Yannah provides a great example, to both her U.S. and Nicaraguan peers, on how much one person can really do to promote education in a rural community in Nicaragua,” said Beth Merrill, executive director of Planting Hope. “You don’t have to have a lot of money to bring about change. If you put time and energy and your heart into something you really care about, you will make something happen.”

“My trip to Nicaragua was unforgettable. It has changed the way I look at life and our world,” Ziegler said. “I always knew that I wanted to make a difference, but actually seeing it happen was probably the most amazing feeling. This trip to Nicaragua and the fundraiser have really confirmed that this is something I want to do. I would love to do more and I am working on it.”

# PLANTING HOPE INTRODUCES TEEN SHADOW PROJECT



Top, Montpelier's Sally Aldrich (left) with Nicaraguan shadow students Selena Gonzalez, Lissania Blandon, Jani Montalvan and Milton Armas (holding Maizy Montalvan). Above, Montpelier High School junior Julie Connor learns firsthand the long process of preparing beans for lunch at her shadow's home.

**T**his year, teenagers from Vermont got to experience life as a Nicaraguan teenager, and their Nicaraguan peers got to know a little more about the realities of life in the U.S.

The 35 students who participated in Planting Hope's winter and spring delegations to Nicaragua inaugurated our new "shadow" project, accompanying Nicaraguan teenagers in their homes, participating in their daily chores, attending classes at San Ramon High School and just hanging out.

Julie Connor, a Montpelier junior, said, "I really enjoyed shadowing Jani. It was interesting to see what her typical day was like in comparison to my own. I liked shadowing in the school classes because I got to see the environment and the ways in which the students learn. Overall, the shadowing experience opened my eyes to a new culture that in certain ways was very similar to my own. My favorite part was just talking with and getting to know Jani and her friends."

## SEEING THE DEVELOPING WORLD FIRSTHAND

"I had never been in a home that was built that way," said Stowe's Calvin Dixon. "It was made out of clay and had dirt for the floor. It was a new experience to see this type of living condition up close, but it is their home and it is the way they live."

Students also gained a firsthand experience in the Nicaraguan school system. "School was very crazy," said Montpelier senior Sammy Rivera. "Everyone was very loud and nobody was sitting down. The kids seemed to have control of the teacher in some ways, instead of the teacher having control of the kids."

## DISTICTLY DIFFERENT YET STRIKINGLY SIMILAR

Having the chance to spend free time together brought to light their similarity as teenagers: liking the same music, using the same technology and visiting the same websites, like Facebook.

"Girls my age here and girls in America are as similar as they are different," said U-32 sophomore Ceres Porter.

Students also gained insights into their own lives through this experience.

Stowe's Kalli Glance "learned how to adapt . . . to a new situation. I tried to assimilate with the kids by talking, playing and making friends with them. It was fun." Stowe's Dash Kim "liked that I got to see life from my shadow's eyes. Honestly, I liked everything and I learned I would be happy living here."

see **SHADOWS**, page 5

*It was really fun to get to know kids our age and learn what they were like and what they do; to see what their cultural norms are firsthand.*

—Abigail Mihaly, 14

**SHADOWS**, from page 4

## TWO-WAY STREET

Through this experience, Nicaraguan teenagers also gleaned new insight, opening up their homes, lives and families to their peers from Vermont. Some of them were able to travel with the groups during the vacation part of the trip, allowing them to see other parts of Nicaragua for the first time.

In their reflection they commented the following: “It is a good project. The students (from Vermont) were interested in our Nicaraguan lives and in sharing with our families. [At the ocean], we learned to take care of ourselves and other people

so that everyone was safe. We learned to relate more with the students from the U.S. because this allows us to know them better and to find out about their lives, some good, some bad, to find out if they have economic hardships like us, or if they have a stable economic conditions. We learned that we should use appropriate vocabulary as Nicaraguans.”

*Nicaraguan shadow participants take a boat ride through Lake Nicaragua’s Isletas in Granada.*



# A NICARAGUAN SHADOW: MILTON

**M**ilton Noe Armas Sanchez, 17, has worked with Planting Hope in various capacities for the past five months. He’s been a construction helper in building La Chispa Library’s administrative office, a bus helper during the brigades, a substitute caretaker at the San Ramon office and a volunteer participant in the Shadow Youth Program. Milton lives in San Ramon’s 11 De Mayo neighborhood and is currently in his second year of high school.

**Why did you like the shadow program and accompanying the Planting Hope brigade of high school students from the U.S.?**

In the short time that I’ve been affiliated with Planting Hope as a shadow student, I have had really good feelings sharing activities, getting to know different lifestyles and different cultures, different places in my own country that I hadn’t imagined I would visit, due to the kind of life I live and not having a lot of money.



*I feel that they are good friends and good people.*

—Milton Noe Armas Sanchez

When we went on the vacation trip with the brigade, I had an awesome time. It was so much fun; I played, I swam, I ate incredible meals, I conversed and I relaxed. This time was useful in making some really good

friends. In spite of the little experience I have, I was able to relate, to learn and to share a lot with them. I feel that they are good friends and good people.

Also, I was able to practice the little English I know with them. They also showed me some other things aside from the language, and they practiced their Spanish with me; I want to congratulate them for being good students! I hope to see them again soon and in the meantime that they take care and enjoy their studies.

I want to thank Planting Hope for offering me the opportunity to be part of this great project. It’s a great help for us as teenagers and urges us to continue our studies, to do our daily household chores and to not follow the bad paths that can influence our lives in a bad way. I hope to continue sharing with more teenagers on delegations from the U.S. and to continue supporting and meeting more teens from the U.S. as well as the social service projects that the organization does.

## A SPANISH HOMESTAY REFLECTION

*Editor's note: Sammy Darmstadt, a seventh grader at U-32 High School, participated in our April teenage trip. He came back so inspired that he wrote this piece in Spanish. We have translated it into English, below.*

Mi viaje a Nicaragua fue fantástico! Nos quedamos con familias Nicas durante nuestra tiempo en San Ramón. Había seis personas en mi familia. Había dos niñas lindas, dos varones y mi madre y padre. Ellos fueron amables, divertidos y muy genuinos. Ellos sirvieron comida muy muy muy delicioso a mi. La niña mayor jugó muchos juegos conmigo y la niña menor pensó que yo fui cómico. Yo tuve una cama limpia con un red de mosquito y tuve un cuarto grande. Yo iré a Nicaragua otra vez en dos años.



*Sammy Darmstadt (center, with hat) learns Latin American dance moves from Yasser Hernandez Perez, delegation coordinator.*

My trip to Nicaragua was fantastic! We stayed with Nicaraguan families during our time in San Ramon. There were 6 people in my family. There were two cute little girls, two guys and my mother and father. They were so nice, fun and genuine. They made me very, very, very delicious food. The older girl (Mili) played a lot of games with me and the little girl thought I was funny. I slept in a large room and clean bed with a mosquito net covering it. I will go back to Nicaragua again in two years.

## THANK YOU, GREEN MOUNTAIN FUND!



*Above, one of the year's first bazaars at Planting Hope's San Ramon Office. Right, Stowe High School students sort donated educational materials to take to Nicaragua during their trip in April.*



**P**lanting Hope and Stowe High School would like to extend a very special thank you to the Vermont Community Foundations grant from the Green Mountain Fund for their contribution to the Stowe High School Delegation with Planting Hope.

### THE \$2,500 GRANT:

- Paid for airline baggage expenses
- Purchased art, math and literacy supplies for the service learning projects
- Defrayed the programs costs for the chaperones

plies for the service learning projects  
 • Defrayed the programs costs for the chaperones

The project ensured 1,600 pounds of and household items made it to Nicaragua and helped raise \$1,300 at Planting Hope's community bazaars.

## PLANTING HOPE GETS NEW WEBSITE

**W**e at Planting Hope are very excited to launch a brand new website. Designed for easy navigability, you can easily find out about all of our programs and events and read bios of all our Nicaraguan staff.

You can also visit the site to easily make a donation to Planting Hope and not even have to write a check or use a stamp.

Make sure to check in often to see what is new with Planting Hope.



# REFLECTIONS FROM DELEGATION MEMBERS

## ASHLEY RAYMOND OF STOWE HIGH SCHOOL

This trip has created a new love in my life for world traveling and experiencing new and different cultures. There is such a different and beautiful culture in Nicaragua; it has made me rethink what is actually important in life.



Ashley Raymond

## CERES PORTER

My memories of Nicaragua, I will never forget. I will forever reminisce on those days, in which I lived simply, peacefully and happily with people who I now refer to as my second family.

My host family was Juana, Christopher, and Eleazar. I fell in love with Christopher immediately (you'd be crazy not to), and recently Juana told me on Facebook that Christopher keeps asking, "When is Ceres coming home?" This lies among many other reasons for why I hope to return next year.

Similarly to Thailand, the people in Nicaragua, although poor, are by far the happiest, most generous people that I have ever met. Coming back to America, my eyes cleared and ignorance defeated, I now see that we are the poor ones. We are the ones who have nothing, for I have realized that wealth is not measured by big houses, shiny cars, brand-name clothing and thick wallets, but by real happiness, community, simplicity and love.



Ceres Porter, right, and her shadow, Lissania.

# NICARAGUA: SPECTACULAR, LIFE CHANGING, AWE-INSPIRING

by Andrew Chambers

The night before the long tear-filled plane ride home, one of our chaperones, Mr. Peterson, went around with a video camera and asked us to sum up the trip in one word or phrase. A thousand words revolved in my mind: spectacular, life changing, awe-inspiring — the list just went on and on. Yet none of these words could ever hope to sum up the experience my classmates and I had in Nicaragua.

What made this trip so indescribable, so unforgettable was the culture. When we were told it was a full-immersion trip, there was no way we could have begun



Andrew Chambers

to comprehend the significance of those words.

What I experienced in Nicaragua with my host family was not a lingual connec-

tion, but a cultural one. While I have no doubt that my Spanish improved on this trip, the change of my cultural perspective was what will stay with me forever. It was truly a different world in Nicaragua, and a huge culture shock for an insular Vermonter from a tiny ski-resort town.

The relationships and experiences that I have had from this trip have given me a new and renewed appreciation for all the blessings I have in my own life, and their effects will stay with me forever. I am so thankful for this amazing experience and I hope that many more students will have the same opportunities.

# JOIN US SOON FOR TWO GREAT LOCAL PLANTING HOPE EVENTS

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A MOBILE LIBRARY FOR PEACE

**TUESDAY, JULY 9, 6:30-8 P.M.**  
HAYES ROOM, KELLOGG-HUBBARD LIBRARY, 135 MAIN ST., MONTPELIER



Michael Sobalvarro, left, co-coordinator of Planting Hope's Mobile Library for Peace, will talk about the challenges and successes of the library, creating a "love of reading in Matagalpa's rural and underserved communities." Co-presented by Planting Hope and the Kellogg-Hubbard Library.

## VERMONT SINGS FOR PEACE VI WITH COUNTERPOINT

**SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 4 P.M.**  
BETHANY CHURCH,  
115 MAIN ST, MONTPELIER



Counterpoint, Vermont's own professional vocal ensemble, will continue the tradition of fundraising for organizations that promote peace.

This year five Vermont choruses will join forces to raise money for Planting Hope's efforts of promoting peace in Nicaragua.

Free admission with a collection taken for Planting Hope's Scholarship Fund.

*Newsletter layout & design by Dana Dwinell-Yardley.*



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*The side of Planting Hope's Mobile Library for Peace.*