

2007 Trip Reports and Community Updates

Alegría

Restoring the old house that had been on former hacienda had long been a dream in this tiny village, because it was their only community building. The walls had fallen down, the rafters rotted, and the roof tiles leaked... so it was difficult – and dangerous – to use as a “Casa Comunal”. Restoring it would allow the community to use it for classes, children’s activities, meetings, and fiestas. So, in July, an International Partners team went to Alegría to make the dream a reality.

The community continued to work after our IP team departed -- using funds we left behind. By mid-August, the walls to the community room were completed and plastered. By September, the roof, doors, and windows were also done. Next community volunteers will start work on the floor. Their work has been delayed both by work in the fields and because they have to wait until the mason, who cut his hand while putting on the roof, gets his stitches out! The community room will be used for meetings, recreation, and educational activities, especially between October and December when children are on vacation from school. Football/soccer News: The 30 something kids who typically play on the Alegría field, planted grass, so no more mud bowls. On September 22nd, the community of Zacamil Dos was scheduled to come to Alegría for a soccer match! We’ll keep you posted on who won!

El Sitio Zapotal

When a generation comes of age in El Salvador, it is common to find that the small field that once sustained your parents and siblings is not sufficient for you and a family of your own as well. And since jobs in El Salvador are difficult to find and don’t usually pay well – the choices for the majority young people are limited. Despite the danger and the sadness, many who face this dilemma leave for the United States – because they are desperate for jobs that can help their family survive.

For the leaders of El Sitio Zapotal, the hope of keeping their youth at home and their families together is literally in their back yard. Community leaders saw the potential on the mountain of Guazapa – a place rich with natural beauty and Salvadoran history. They dreamed of starting an eco-tourism business by attracting tourists and guiding them up the nearby volcano Guazapa. Two years ago, International Partners began to share that dream and became their partner. Since then, two IP delegations have worked alongside the energetic youth from this community -- clearing trails, creating an office, bathrooms, and driveway at the entrance and building look-outs and a kitchen on the mountain. And the youth of the village have already started leading tours.

Since our delegation left in July, the kitchen on the eco-tourism route has bamboo walls and a sheet-metal roof. All that remains now is to fill in the bamboo with mud to complete the walls. Next they are designing a new lookout near an old guerrilla camp that they recently discovered. And a local artist is helping them paint wooden boards to be posted as trail markers. Down at the bottom of the mountain, they graveled around the eco-tourism office to prevent erosion and puddles. On Saturdays, the office with new parking area has become the site of a pupuseria. REDES, a Salvadoran NGO that works locally, has offered to help the youth grow the business if it is successful. Accepting the

challenge, by mid September the youth earned \$40 from making pupusas! They are putting the money in a “youth box” for future activities. Ideas for future expansion of the eco-tourism office include making a mini children’s library, making a crafts center for kids, and museum. Build it, and they will come?

Hacienda Vieja

Hacienda Vieja has been the “home” for five International Partners delegations. We began by building a preschool on an old dump and delegation after delegation has returned to help with new projects. Last year, we added an additional room that could serve as a community center for the ever-expanding list of activities that take place there – a preschool, English classes, adult literacy classes, health classes and small library.

This year, the community wanted to pipe water to forty-five houses where the families had to walk for water because they have no water running to their houses. The pipes are now buried and the water tank is complete, thanks to the community volunteers and the IP team that went there in July, but the water is not yet flowing. What became a problem is that some large landowners and other communities did not want them to pipe more water because water is becoming a scarce resource in El Salvador. Now there are two possible sources of water to fill the new tank: one is the old tank, which has water overflowing from it; the second is drilling a well somewhere near the new tank. The community finds itself deep in legal, political, financial, inter-community, intra-community and hydro geologic issues to get water from either—and ideally, eventually, both of these water sources.

Meanwhile the preschool is thriving. In addition to letters, numbers, and colors, the children are planting trees, learning to cook, and raising money for an end-of-the-year trip to a children’s museum in San Salvador. Thanks to lessons from this year’s IP delegate Katie Wheatley, the children are teaching each other how to knit. And, a nice surprise to us all, after weekend recreational activities, community members are gathering for reflections, “just like Partners does.”

Zacamil Dos

The new community center in Zacamil Dos—the first public building this village has ever had—was started in July by the community members and a team of IP volunteers. Now it is nearly finished! Our delegation constructed the walls and now the roof is done. The mayor gave the community funds for an outdoor corridor, doors, and windows, and a cement floor inside the room. The community is very proud of their building and what they accomplished together. They will use their community center for meetings, classes, and dances. In the first classes, high school students and graduates will be teaching older people how to read. High school students used to go to the local primary school (several miles away) to mentor children who were falling behind, now will be able to tutor in the new community center. When the community center is completed, the village hopes to work on a water project to pipe water to people houses so that they don’t have to walk down and then up a long steep embankment to carry water from the river to their hilltop community.

Dental Delegation Returns

Poor people who have no access to dental care or even tooth paste suffer with continual pain from extreme tooth decay and infectious dental disease. For the fifth year, our annual dental delegation, lead by oral surgeon, Dr. Susan Runner, returned to the same small community to sit in a folding chair in a hot school room, peering into a mouth lit by a flashlight held by another IP volunteer. This year, bolstered by a new piece of portable dental equipment and two youth delegates with aspirations to be dentists, Susan saw 35-40 patients every day. Families come from miles away, often with their children, to wait all day hoping that that Dr. Susan can help them. By the end of this year's delegation, Susan had seen 350 patients – relieving pain and preventing future problems.

Even more remarkable, Susan has been emphasizing prevention and is now keeping records so she can chart the progress of each person and family. Proudly she will tell you how specific families have learned to use the toothpaste she supplies and how they have saved their teeth. Most inspiring of all is when a young woman, decayed teeth, looks into the mirror to see her now-white-again, cavity-filled teeth gleaming as she smiles – usually with a tear of gratitude and disbelief. How much better the world would be if there were more Dr. Susan's and the delegates who help her.