

## Nicaragua Community Partnership: 2008

Dear Business Owner-

I am part of a group of public health students planning to spend our winter intercession in rural Nicaragua on community service projects; we find ourselves in need of monetary support in order to pay for travel and living expenses. Would you please consider being a sponsor of our efforts?

We are Masters of Public Health students at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. This experience will be an opportunity for us to put our new skills into action. The town we are visiting, Ocotal in the department of Nueva Segovia, currently needs help with two specific health issues: reducing the transmission of mosquito-borne dengue fever and understanding and taking steps to prevent an unusually high youth suicide rate. For the next several months, we will be collaborating with the community, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and other public health experts to design health promotion programs to address dengue, suicide, and other pertinent health issues.



*Nicaraguan children wait to be seen at a school-based mobile clinic. © 2006 Parmi Suchdev*

Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, having endured many natural and man-made catastrophes that have severely impacted its economy, infrastructure, and the overall health of its people. Seventeen percent of the population lives in extreme poverty, and 50 percent is unemployed or underemployed. While some progress is being made to improve health, resources remain constrained and limited.

In 2005, Nicaragua had more deaths from dengue fever than all other Central American countries combined. Due to its lack of resources, Nicaragua must rely on individual families to take measures in preventing the spread of this dangerous disease. The health of the people is dependent on every citizen being responsible

for preventing standing water, which serves as a mosquito breeding grounds. We aim to support dengue fever health education efforts and the implementation of a surveillance system which tracks how successful these efforts have been and highlights areas that need improvement.

Another public health problem evident in Nicaragua is youth suicide. According to a recent study, almost 50% of adolescent males and females have some form of suicidal expression. The underlying causes for this trend are still being studied, but local officials need tools that they can use now to address this issue. Our team will walk the leaders of Ocotal through the public health approach, empowering them to define the problem and learn where they can best intervene to save the lives of their youth. We will also be working directly with the young people of the town to build confidence, problem-solving skills, and investment in their local community— all shown to have an impact in reducing suicidal ideation.

The Nicaragua Community Partnership began in 2006 with a group of 9 students. Based on the expenses associated with last year's trip, we estimate that for our group of 10 to travel to Nicaragua, we will need to raise \$8000. This amount covers our airfare and accommodations with Nicaraguan host families during the 14 day experience in Ocotal. If you are able to support our efforts, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the partnership. To make a donation, you can write a check to "JB Grant Society" (our parent student organization) and write "Nicaragua" in the notes section. Please use the attached self-addressed, postage-paid envelope to ensure that your gift is routed to our fundraising account.

Your contribution will be recognized in our media release about the trip and all other publicity about the project. It will also make an impact on the community of Ocotal as we work to help the residents improve various aspects of their health.

Thank you so much for your time and support.  
Sincerely,



*A Johns Hopkins student from last year's Partnership with Ocotal inspects a tire used for water storage, a possible site for mosquito breeding and, potentially, the spread of dengue fever.*

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