



ACTS Newsletter

Americans Caring Teaching Sharing



www.actshonduras.org

Fall, 2018

Welcome to this window on ACTS' work in Honduras. Our purpose is "community development," which we define as helping people to make their own communities stronger. Many of the topics in the media, like immigration and global warming, are of great relevance to Hondurans, too. Living life just one bad drought away from ruin with many children to feed is a fraught existence. We try to work at both ends of the spectrum: making the proper basics like clean water and dentistry accessible and enriching life with a library, computer and English classes. We hope you'll read about what we do and make a commitment to help by funding this important work. Every dollar you give goes to Honduras. We don't own or rent anything (except a postal box!) and have no employees. Your questions are always welcome!

AGRICULTURE



Community meeting to discuss crop failure.

Living Without a Safety Net

Four years of relentless drought in the Loco Mapa region of Honduras have culminated in a catastrophic, near total failure of this year's corn crop. Farmers planted their corn in early June in anticipation of the rainy season. It rained only once in July and once in August. Much of the corn died and what survived has not produced enough grain to feed the families, let alone pay off the loans that were taken out to pay for seed and fertilizer.

Now it is time to plant the beans. This second agricultural and nutritional staple of the area is usually planted in between the rows of maturing corn and all are harvested together in January. Because of the corn crop failure, most farmers cannot afford to buy bean seeds or the fertilizer needed for a successful crop. Without a good crop of beans these farm families are facing the prospect of widespread hunger.

So far there is enough drinking water for livestock but there is little forage for cattle and there is no excess corn for laying hens, meat chickens or pigs. Animals are being sold off for money or eaten for food, leaving fewer opportunities for the future.

In the short term the farmers need bean seeds, fertilizer and rain. ACTS is helping with emergency funding for the bean planting. With hopes for a more sustainable future, ACTS is partnering with Honduran farmers and with FHIA (Fundacion Hondurena de Investigacion para Agricultura) to develop irrigation technology and more efficient, sustainable agricultural methods.



Normally six feet high, corn is without ears and barely knee-high.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Jinny Brack, pediatrics and primary care, Hanover, NH
- Suzanne Burgos, primary care, Bethel VT
- Molly Drummond, photography Hartford VT
- Michael Harris, educational administration, Etna NH
- Robert Keene, global health, dentistry, Etna NH
- Linda Kennedy, agriculture, cancer prevention, Thetford Center VT
- Ethan LaRochelle, computer technology, Hanover NH
- Betsy Rybeck Lynd, education, Plainfield NH
- Kayla Marra, external relations, Enfield NH
- Peter Mason, primary care, public health, Lebanon NH
- Theresa Mundy, education, Lyme NH
- Sheldon Novick, legal affairs, Norwich VT
- Juliana Ortego, teen leadership, Palo Alto CA
- Jennifer Randolph, organizational data, Hanover NH
- John Sanders, medicine, Lyme NH
- Dan Saulnier, water systems, Boston MA
- Dean Seibert, public health, Norwich VT
- Hart Silverwood, treasurer, Lee NH
- Brad Taylor, agriculture, Newton County, AR
- Helen Whyte, community organizer, Manchester, VT



The Agrochemical Mitigation Program

Farming in the Honduran mountains is a constant challenge to beat the bugs, fungi, and weeds. Over the past few decades, farmers have relied on agrochemicals including pesticides, fungicides, and herbicides to improve their chances of a good harvest. Unfortunately, those chemicals are dangerous to the users and anyone who comes in contact with the substances. The chemicals are expensive and farmers guard them carefully, by keeping them under the bed. This poses a severe danger for children in the home. In 2017 we opened the Agricultural Facility where farmers can store chemicals and equipment, get free masks, gloves and goggles, and wash themselves and their clothing before going home to their families. We began in June 2017 with 25 users that grew to 50 over the season. In 2018 between June 1 and September 10, the logbook shows 97 users.

Much of this success should be credited to the teenage leadership program La Fuerza para el Futuro – the Force for the Future. Led by Jules Ortego, a group of Dartmouth undergrads taught 50+ teens in Honduras a public health curriculum about agrochemicals, who then taught it to other kids and farming families.

To make life safer for kids in other communities that don't have a facility, we provided materials for more than 100 child-proof storage boxes that were constructed by families in Chaquite and Carrezelito.

HEALTH



The Vision and Cancer Jornada – May 2018

Building on our successful history of large-scale cancer screening, with another generous grant from the Zondervan Foundation, we hosted a vision and cancer screening for more than 600 adults. Honduran ophthalmologist Carlos Gonzales screened each attendee. Anyone who needed reading glasses got a free pair. Everyone received free sunglasses for essential protection from the bright Honduran sun that causes pterygium. Dr. Gonzales prescribed lens for more complicated needs. Elders with cataracts

are going to his clinic in San Pedro Sula for surgery. Imagine being able to see your grandchildren for the first time! Moreover, these elders can be independent and enjoy life.



Carlos was abandoned as an infant with polio and adopted by Valentina who raised him. In May, at the Vision Jornada, Dr. Gonzales saw severe cataracts in both eyes. Speaking to her so kindly, he explained that he could remove them, and she would be able to see again. Her smile was hesitant; it was hard to believe.



Revisiting the Men's Jornada – a year later

Though we had been told "Honduran men don't go to the doctor unless they are dead," Linda Kennedy and investigators from Dartmouth's Norris Cotton Cancer Center, along with our community partners and colleagues from La Liga Contra Cancer in San Pedro Sula, hosted a multi-organ cancer screening for men over age 18 in 2017. Screening for prostate, colon, testicular, skin and oral cancer determined who was at high risk using onsite methods including health surveys, clinical exams, and pathology. Identifying high-risk individuals isn't enough, the proof of value is in connecting them with a cancer center for a proper diagnosis and treatment if needed.

We have great news – 100% of the men identified as high-risk complied with the recommendation to seek clinical follow-up at La Liga Contra Cancer. They traveled by bus in groups of 3 and 4 and were warmly received at La Liga for the next steps in diagnosis and treatment. Lives were saved.

The Health Center in El Rosario helps families with the cost of transportation to their clinic and the cancer center in San Pedro Sula for a total of \$2,000 per year.



Concern about Stunting

Pediatrician Jinny Brack with Betsy Lynd checked 200 elementary students in Rosario and nearby Chaguite, for height and weight, vision and hearing. They identified 11 children whose vision did not meet standards and they were evaluated by Dr. Gonzales at the Vision Jornada and fitted for glasses. Plotting the kids' measurements against the World Health Organization charts, 30% of the kids in each school are classified as stunted. This matches the rate in the Honduran population and is a grave concern. Stunting because of undernourishment in childhood has both immediate and long-term effects on intelligence and ability to function. Research found that the most significant predictor of under-nutrition is the mother's education and we plan a 5-year program for pre-natal and lactating women to improve their understanding of childhood nutrition.

Multivitamins for kids cost \$40/year per child



TB adds to Ilda's burden

In September, Ilda was diagnosed with tuberculosis. Ilda is a widow with 3 children disabled by the genetic disease homocystinuria that begins its assault at age 4 rendering those with the disease blind, non-verbal, and cognitively impaired. One adult daughter is healthy, and she looks after her siblings and her two babies. Normally, Ilda does laundry for families but now that's out of the question. We keep a close eye on Ilda and the kids, providing their groceries, checking on their health, and letting her know that we care.

Feeding Ilda and her family costs \$75 per month

Family Planning

Birth control is available at the Health Center and provided for the equivalent of 50 cents per month to those who join the program. Information about "growing up," sexuality, and family planning are not part of the school curriculum. At a recent discussion for

teenage girls titled "How a Woman's Body Works" led by Jinny Brack, a show of hands revealed that only 1 of 19 girls had ever discussed the changes in her body with any adult.

In March, we were in Chaguite teaching adults about pesticides and asked what they would like to learn about next year. The answer was clear: sexually transmitted diseases. Not willing to lose the opportunity, we rustled up a condom and a broomstick for an impromptu class on condom use to prevent the spread of disease. We closed that lesson saying, "Condoms work for preventing disease, but to prevent pregnancy, you need another method." The crowd said, "We don't know about that, we want to learn."

The next day, Sue Burgos hiked four miles to get there by 9 a.m. to teach a class on family planning. Her audience was a mixed group of attentive men and women.

The following day, as we were eating breakfast about 7 a.m., the nurse sent a runner from the Health Center to ask for some help. So early, what was going on? When Sue rounded the corner, she saw the front porch of the Health Center filled with women. They were her "students" from the contraception class the day before. They were informed and eager to begin taking control of planning their families.



Dental Program Expands

To accommodate increased demand, we have again increased the number of days our dentists see patients at The Smile Clinic. What began as one weekend per month is now four days per month and continuing to grow. Dr. Reina uses Fridays to rotate through the elementary schools teaching dental hygiene, applying fluoride treatments, and making referrals to the clinic. The other days, she attends patients at the Smile Clinic. Our ACTS dental expert is Dr. Bob Keene and he will be onsite in El Rosario in January with a team of dental professionals from the U.S. who will work alongside the Hondurans and share some new techniques.

Latrines Needed

About 10 years ago, thanks to our partners Engineers Without Borders, the sleepy village of Chaguite got a decent water system and it became a desirable place to live. Rapid growth expanded the little place and now 80 families live on the Chaguite hillside. Other than water, there are no municipal services and only ten of 80 families have latrines. Everyone else relieves themselves in the bushes. This is unsanitary and unhealthy. The families are anxious for sanitary facilities and have asked for our help. With funding, we will facilitate a rapid-fire dig-and-build program to put up 70 latrines in just a few months.

Latrines are \$75 each and 70 are needed at a total of \$5,250

EDUCATION



Education to Prepare for Good Jobs

We saw pride and wide smiles throughout El Rosario when the first class of 18 students graduated from the local high school. Their achievement far surpassed the education their parents and older siblings could attain and opens doors for a variety of jobs outside of the village. Most plan to work in San Pedro Sula for a few years and then return to Rosario where as they say, life is tranquil.

In addition to the regular high school curriculum, the students took extra classes at the Community Education Center in English and computers. Demand for English classes is so high that Cesar teaches three sections for a total of 60 enrolled students.

\$2500 provides Cesar's salary and a year of classes for 60 students.

To provide a better learning environment, we added a dedicated classroom to the back of the Center. Dean Seibert and Don Metz's clever collaboration encompasses the back patio, essentially keeping the footprint of the building the same while providing learning space for 15-20 students. Our 8 computers are rare treasures in that environment and are used for classes and in the Library where students earn computer access by reading books.

\$5,000 is the technology budget for 2019 and it includes replacing 4 laptops, expanding our intranet to other communities, and improved teaching technology

ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

We joined Partners of the Americas

President Kennedy's 1963 Alliance for Progress, a government-to-government initiative to drive economic progress had a person-to-person component, called Partners of the Americas, for ordinary people who wanted to help others. ACTS joined Partners this year and linked with the only Honduran chapter, located in Comayagua. Kayla Marra and Sheldon Novick envisioned and secured our first Partners grant to bring a Honduran English teacher here for a month to improve his teaching skills at a Rassias Foundation course.

A Giant Load of Useful Items Heading to Honduras

We have a shipment of about three thousand pounds of useful goods ready to go and awaiting clearances from the U.S. Air Force that will transport it under a humanitarian allowance, and the Honduran Ministry of Finance that will receive it. This is a long-term project for Dean Seibert and Mike Harris that holds great promise for future transportation of essential donations.



SHARING OUR SUCCESS WITH OTHER PARTNERS

Many fine organizations want to work with the poorest people but don't have the connections to get involved. We are proud to partner with and assist excellent organizations from Honduras to New England to help rural Hondurans improve their own lives.

Engineers Without Borders Northeastern University – Undergraduate and Alumni Chapters -- water systems

The Dorothy and Jack Byrne Foundation – funds La Fuerza para el Futuro

Liga Contra Cancer from Honduras – cancer screening, treatment, research, and their PESCA program

Dartmouth's Norris Cotton Cancer Center – cancer screening and research

Dartmouth-Hitchcock Pathology – research partnership to prevent cancer

Honduran Foundation for Investigation of Agriculture (FHIA) – agricultural extension agency

Zondervan Foundation – library support and promotion of reading at home, vision screening

NH Charitable Trust – facility to reduce agricultural chemical exposure

Coverys Community Foundation – education and management to reduce agricultural chemical exposure

Partners of the Americas Comayagua Honduras – funding for travel to USA to attend Rassias course

The Rassias Foundation – immersion programs in teaching English

Lyme Congregational Church's Bargain Barn, and United Church of Dorset and East Rupert's Rummage Sales – donated clothing

Universidad de Católica San Pedro Sula – academic partner, medical students, institutional review board

The fire departments of Hanover and Springfield NH, Thetford and Windsor VT – firefighting equipment