



ACTS Newsletter

Americans Caring Teaching Sharing



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Fall 2022



ACTS' time in Honduras has been a learning experience, for everyone. After these two years of unforeseen difficulty, we are taking a moment to salute our partners in El Rosario who have leveraged leadership and sweat equity to improve life for their neighbors and others beyond their communities. Lately, we've been reflecting on the trajectory of our community building projects, which begin with heavy input and funding from ACTS and transition to Honduran leadership and reshaping according to their experience. These handoffs are very satisfying, for everyone. This approach of rolling priorities allows ACTS to work with local leaders to identify the next challenges to address. Your donations make this possible; we are completely funded by donations from people like you. **Indications of how we spend donations are in bold.** Thanks!

Linda Kennedy

ACTS Honduras, President

This solemn family in the indigenous community of Potrerillos will be among the first beneficiaries of the new water system and will have running water for the first time ever. The red stake in the photo marks the location where their water tap will be located! Their expressions are typical; they hope for a good outcome but can't believe it will really happen.

MEDICAL AND DENTAL CARE

HOW DOES MEDICAL CARE WORK?

What began decades ago as a pop-up clinic organized by ACTS with clinicians from the U.S. providing basic treatment a few times per year has evolved. During those decades, virtually every antibiotic, pair of crutches, and roll of gauze was transported by hand in giant duffle bags at great effort and expense.

Today, the Clinic is open Monday – Friday staffed by Nurse Nolvía who is joined by Dr. Alysa on Saturdays. Once a month, from Friday through Monday, Dr. Reina performs clinical dentistry and does outreach for pediatric preventive dentistry at ten elementary schools. Dr. Sarahi, a bilingual MD, helps regularly to bridge communication between the Spanish-speakers and the ACTS Medical Committee. Patients benefit

from a pharmacy well-stocked with medications and supplies sourced in-country. **Dr. Sarahi helps Nelson, the Clinic president, purchase high quality, reliable medicines at the best cost.**

Those who can, pay a minimal clinical consulting fee and for their medications. Income is used to stock the pharmacy and for upkeep on the facility. The Honduran government provides free birth control. **ACTS funds the staff salaries and with this set-up, the budget is balanced.**

When we can be in Honduras, ACTS' clinical team teaches new skills to the Honduran staff, consults on serious illnesses, reviews medications and treatment plans, and makes home visits for the elderly and housebound. Depending on the subspecialties represented within the team, the El Rosario Clinic committee sends out the word that special clinics will be

available in pediatrics with Jinny Brack, in geriatrics and long-term care with Sue Burgos, in heart and lung with John Sanders, and in drugs, alcohol, and family medicine with Peter Mason.

To avoid home births and have access to doctors 24/7, pregnant women travel, at least a week in advance of their due date, to the city of Yoro where they are in residence in a prenatal dormitory until delivery at the Yoro public hospital. Conditions are sub-par, and it was good news to hear the maternity section is being rebuilt. It is an important regional resource for family health. **ACTS provided Nelson Mejia, president of the Clinic Committee with significant funding for them to donate to the construction project.**

What are the serious issues today?

Water, a problem throughout the dry corridor of Honduras, is a problem in the clinic too, where water from the local source is high in sediment, which first clogs, and then damages, dental equipment. **Keeping finicky dental equipment running in a remote location is extremely difficult and costly.** We are lucky that ACTS dentists Bob Keene and Dave Bogascz have a relationship with a Honduran technician who, through the magic of Zoom, is coached through some of the trickier repairs.

Serious illnesses and conditions, including sickle cell anemia, cancer, paralysis, and dengue are long-term challenges and often require referral to Honduran sub-specialists. **Frequently, ACTS subsidizes the cost of treatment.**

Malnutrition and stunting are endemic in poor countries including Honduras where one-third of adults have stunted growth, which affects brain development and reduces stature. ACTS' Taking Care of Moms is a multi-year project, originally funded by the Margot Krasnoff Foundation, to teach young mothers how to take care of infants – and themselves – with an emphasis on proactive practices in feeding, rest, hygiene, and mental health. Nurse Nolvía delivers the classes designed by ACTS and tracks infant and baby growth to consult with mothers about supplemental feeding if kids are not growing at normal rates.

CANCER SCREENING

In 2013, we began a sophisticated scientific partnership led by the Dartmouth Cancer Center (formerly known as Norris Cotton Cancer Center) and La Liga Contra el Cancer in Honduras to determine best practices for cancer screening in extreme and remote locations of low-resource countries. Key to operationalizing the protocol were the competent and enthusiastic local leaders in El Rosario who motivated community members to participate and made many of the local arrangements. With their leadership, 90% of men and women identified as needing clinical follow-up for potential cancer complied with that recommendation. Much of this work has been published in scientific journals and presented internationally. In another example of Hondurans learning by doing and then taking responsibility for the future, the leadership of El Rosario in partnership with the Honduran cancer center is now sustaining cancer screening in the community.



To facilitate Nurse Nolvía staying in the community and working at the clinic long-term, ACTS arranged a zero-percent interest and fully refundable mortgage that allowed her to purchase a home. Here she gives a “thumbs up” outside her home close to the Clinic.

MANAGEMENT OF COVID-19

Since we last reported in November 2021 much progress has been made in the fight against COVID 19.

Nurse Nolvía worked together with the health department to coordinate vaccine clinics in El Rosario.

The Honduran government mandated that the vaccines be rolled out by age starting with elders. Multiple clinics were held as vaccine became available, eventually reaching the local youth. Under the leadership of clinic president Nelson Mejía, Nurse Nolvía was able to offer vaccines to anyone eligible. She also provided education and guidance on the importance of the vaccine.

Knowing that many people in the surrounding villages would be unable to travel to the clinic in El Rosario, ACTS covered transportation costs for Nolvía and additional clinic personnel to deploy vaccines to the many remote villages in the region.

Because testing has not been available, Nurse Nolvía has utilized a triage system. Patients presenting to the clinic with mild COVID symptoms are provided education about self-isolation, those with more severe symptoms are referred to the hospital in Yoro. **Transportation costs to the hospital are covered by ACTS.**

About 5 years ago, the Clinic Committee recruited Nurse Nolvía who moved into a rental home with her kids. Her kindness, professional skills, and work ethic were apparent from Day One. This year, we were pleased to help her to stay permanently in a home she wanted to buy. Mortgages are absolutely unaffordable in Honduras and **our no-interest and fully refundable loan over four years is making home ownership possible for a superb nurse who is the backbone of community health.**

This is the view from Ilda Vieda's doorway after a rainy day in Honduras. Laundry is on the fence and the leaning logs will become wood for her cookstove, after she chops them with a machete.



THE VIEDA FAMILY

For more than ten years, with Ilda Vieda's encouragement, we have been telling you about her family and the serious illness her children have – homocystinuria, a genetic condition that manifests at age four and results in blindness, skeletal deformities, rapid cognitive decline, and other symptoms. Ilda, a widow with five living children has three with the disease; all require full-time supervision and care by her. Monthly, ACTS has provided groceries so that she had enough food for everyone. In April, one child became bedridden and took only liquids for months. We've heard recently that she sometimes is out of bed. Progress. The burden on Ilda became unsustainable; she was depressed and exhausted. The local Health & Development Committee consulted with ACTS about the declining situation and with ACTS funding arranged for a woman known to Ilda to work full-time helping with the kids and giving her support. This is a long-term commitment for ACTS; there is no cure for homocystinuria.

AGRICULTURE

Farming is the only available occupation for most folks in El Rosario, and the changing climate as well as soil degradation are headwinds that our Honduran friends are finding increasingly difficult to cope with. Crop yields are down while the costs of fertilizer, pesticides, and seeds are skyrocketing. Years of poor soil management and mono-cropping make all these problems worse. **ACTS is devoting resources to discovering solutions to these problems and educating El Rosario farmers about how regenerative agriculture can provide resiliency to drought while reducing input costs.** Crop diversification is a fundamental piece of the solution as well, both by fostering soil health and providing a varied diet for the subsistence farmers and their families.

In 2022, ACTS funded a trip to southern Honduras for three farmers from El Rosario to learn from an NGO called COSECHA about how crop diversification and green manure are helping farmers in this drier region enjoy more reliable income. A group of ACTS volunteers joined the farmers from El Rosario in visiting COSECHA's projects and plans to work with more communities beyond El Rosario to determine how best to ensure crop security both in the short term and for future generations.



Farmers from El Rosario consult with successful fruit-growers in a dry part of the country.

EDUCATION

After more than two years of pandemic closure, schools are fully operational. Remember, during that time, most schools were damaged by back-to-back hurricanes. **ACTS worked with ten communities to fund repairs to the schools and prepare them for this recent reopening.** The next step will be stocking the schools with new books funded by a generous grant from the Zondervan Foundation.

Post lockdown at the Education Center in El Rosario, the library and classes for English and computers have resumed. **To meet demand, we now have two part-time assistants managing the library, freeing the full-time librarian to devote more time to teaching computer classes and supervising the English classes.** Teachers bring elementary



Assistant Librarian Anna is busy helping elementary students to connect with library resources. Anna learned English at the Education Center and is crazy about reading fantasy. She attended the local high school and is enrolled in university courses for commercial art.

school classes to the library for enrichment and after school, the library is packed with high school students using the internet and book collection to do homework.

Every family needs cash income and many are benefitting from the success of their children who completed high school in El Rosario with added classes at the Education Center in computers and English that allowed them to compete in the fierce job markets of urban Honduras. Typically, they work in the garment factories, and several are also taking university courses.



Librarian Yorlin also teaches computer classes in the long, narrow classroom squeezed into the Education Center. Students learn Word, Excel, Powerpoint, etc. on basic computers we buy in Honduras for about \$350 each.

Behind the Education Center, on what was a narrow strip of lousy soil, the Faith and Hope Garden group of women is growing vegetables in a public demonstration of how improving soil and using rooftop catchment of water for local irrigation can make almost any space produce vegetables to add interest and nutrients to family meals. This is Dean Seibert's vision and his long-term connection with families has made this a supportive and committed group willing to learn and experiment. Ultimately, the women will replicate what they have learned in their own yards.

SPECIAL NOTES

PARTNERING FOR THE FUTURE

As we send this, we are consulting with The Children's Initiative, a Portland Maine based NGO also working in El Rosario, to collaborate more closely with them long-term. Charlie Miller, center, with Mike Harris and Linda Kennedy, and others in a series of meetings are considering how Charlie can "retire" from his excellent work and responsibilities for the high school in El Rosario and take advantage of ACTS' mature infrastructure to ensure his work endures. More to follow!



INFRASTRUCTURE

QUALITY WATER FOR QUALITY OF LIFE



While we supply the engineering know-how, the Hondurans participate in building the water system including digging miles of trench.

The communities of Ocotal and Potrerillos lack a source of potable water. Ocotal's water system has been contaminated by agricultural activity, and residents rely on bottled water, if they can afford it. Potrerillos is an indigenous village completely lacking any water supply or access to bottled water. Inhabitants fetch water from a polluted river, then carry it half a mile up a steep hill, and often fall ill from drinking the river water.

ACTS is partnering with a group of Engineering alumni from Northeastern University

who have done targeted fundraising and are volunteering to design an ambitious gravity-fed water system to meet the needs of both Ocotal and Potrerillos. The nearest available source of clean water is an underground spring high in the mountains more than 2,000 vertical feet above these villages. **With ACTS funding the purchase of PVC pipe, cement, and other materials**, the Hondurans have hand-dug three miles of trench for water pipes and built tanks to keep the water pressure in check. Two

Engineering teams from the US traveled to Ocotal in 2022 to supervise the tank construction, build bridges for the pipe to cross gullies and a river, and plan a distribution network to bring clean water to each home.

LATRINES FOR DIGNITY

In a region with no public sewer system and extreme poverty, the default for many is finding privacy for elimination in the bushes. **For decades, we've been supplying funding, materials, and know-how for families to build sanitary latrines, aka outhouses.**

In 2022, with Honduran families doing all the organizing, digging, and heavy lifting, we completed latrine building for the full community of Chaquite. Over three phases, community knowledge and enthusiasm grew as they saw better health, a cleaner community, and appreciated private and secure facilities designated for each family.

The cost of this last phase of 22 latrines was \$248 each – an absolute bargain for the benefits to public health, security, and self-esteem.



Here Bessey learns how to wire the rebar frame that will become the floor of her latrine. The vessel in the center is part of the form to build the stool.

ENTREPRENEURS



Locked down for 2+ years during the pandemic, several local people became entrepreneurs. Their businesses rely on local people for trade and that's a tough situation because many have very little disposable income. Of note is this barbershop offering stylish cuts and a pool hall.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Our Steering Committee is a group of committed professionals bringing tremendous breadth of knowledge and experience to community building in Honduras.

Dave Bogacz, dentistry, Tilton NH

Suzanne Burgos, primary care, Bethel VT

Michael Harris, educational administration, Etna NH

Tim Keane, operations, Thetford VT

Robert Keene, global health, dentistry, Hanover NH

Linda Kennedy, agriculture, infrastructure, cancer prevention, Thetford Center VT

Ethan LaRochelle, education, technology, Thetford Center VT

Betsy Rybeck Lynd, agriculture, education, Plainfield NH

Peter Mason, primary care, public health, Lebanon NH

Theresa Mundy, education, Lyme NH

Juliana Ortego, teen leadership, NYC NY

Lisa Purvis, education and public health, Woodstock, VT

Jennifer Randolph, organizational data, Hanover NH

John Sanders, medicine, Lyme NH

Dan Saulnier, infrastructure, agriculture, water systems, Springfield NH

Hart Silverwood, treasurer, Durham NH

Brad Taylor, agriculture, veterinary medicine, Ithaca NY

Helen Whyte, community organizer, Lyme NH

Bryce Wilson, agriculture and water systems, Cupertino CA

Dean Seibert, active emeritus, Norwich VT