



Education Plus Nicaragua

2-year Anniversary Report



Our Story



The Castillo Family the first day we met, May 2012. Prisila is in pink, far right

Our Story

"There is a school opening up in my house Monday!" 8-year old Prisila Castillo cried running from house to house telling all her friends and neighbors. On the afternoon of November 12, 2012, 40 of Prisila's friends, cousins and their siblings showed up at her house to receive classes from 3 volunteers. Huddled over small plastic tables, Education Plus Nicaragua was formally established as an after school program.

For over a year and a half, we taught classes and provided meals from Prisila's home every day of the week. Prisila's mother and aunt would wake up at 5am to start cooking for the children, and while the bedrooms of this small house overflowed with supplies and boxes of rice donated by Samaritan's International, the family never complained. Prisila even wrote us a letter once saying, "Thank you for making a school in my house."

Still, for a long time we dreamed of having a place of our own. Finally, in June 2014, our community center Casa de los Sueños (CDS) opened to the joy of 150 children and their parents.

Education Plus Today

Education Plus Nicaragua provides activities, classes, and meals to widen horizons, instill core values, and provide children with opportunities that keep them off the streets and into education. In a country with the highest primary school dropout rate in Central America, our students believe that going to University is within their reach. Not only that, the children arrive to our program overjoyed to be there. You can see it in their smiles and excitement as they enter, rushing to hug local staff and international volunteers alike before getting in line for attendance.

The Education Plus Mission and Vision

To serve the children of Pantanal, the poorest of the poor, to make it possible for them to succeed in school and career so that changes will come to their families and country, thus ending the cycle of poverty in their lives.

FAST FACTS

Our Community

Barrio Pantanal - Founded in 1992 with no urban planning as a place for natural disaster refugees from other parts of Nicaragua

11,700 residents, 7,000 of which are children

3 primary and secondary schools

Source of majority of Granada's criminals, child prostitutes and street childrenⁱ

< 48% children graduate from primary schoolⁱⁱ

80% of parents are un- or under-employedⁱⁱⁱ

45% do not always have money to buy food^{iv}

Education Plus

Student enrollment November 2012: 40

Student Enrollment November 2014: 200

Ages served: 2- 16

Classes per day: 13

Subjects taught: English, Spanish, Math

Number of clubs: 5 - Reading, Math, Dance, Sports, and Community Justice League

Activities: 2x yearly medical checkups, annual Christmas Party, Beach Field Trip and Managua Field Trip, monthly parents' meetings.

Meals served since 2012: 44,894

Program Retention Rate: 98%^v

Full-time Volunteers since 2012: 121



Barrio Pantanal, Nicaragua

Then and Now



July 2012 Teaching English ad-hoc in the Castillo home to 15 children



November 2012 Day 1 of our official school opening, 40 children



January 2013 Profesor Williams teaches 4 classes, 70 students total



April 2013 A roof over our heads!



June 2014 Casa de los Sueños Opens! 150 children enroll



November 2014 200 students, each studying 3 hours per day

OUR CHILDREN

Shortly after Wanda was taken to Costa Rica by their abusive mother, her brother Estiven was having an especially tough day. He had always been a kid that played rough and never let anyone push him around, but that day the volunteers had to discipline him a few times for his behavior.

After English class, he had one-on-one reading class and I was his teacher that day. The whole lesson, as he practiced reading and writing, he wrote about Wanda. At the end I asked him to write one sentence about whatever he wanted. He wrote, "I miss you Wanda, I love you forever" along with a drawing of a crying face. I told him that he did well and asked if it was hard at home. He broke down crying and I held him in my arms for several minutes as he sobbed. When he was done, he wiped his face and went off the play.

I had never seen Estiven cry before that and I never saw it again, even when he was hurt pretty seriously. The kids of Pantanal almost always show you smiling faces and giggles. But after spending time with them you find out little bits of what they go through at home: domestic violence, lack of health care, some don't know if they will eat. To have one of the children share their pain with you is a very rare experience, and it was nice to know that I built that level of trust with Estiven.

- Volunteer Keeley Walsh



Estiven, 9

Our Initiatives

It cannot be overemphasized how much of a difference it makes for the children of Pantanal to have a place to come where they are safe and welcome before or after school. At CDS we provide such a place close to home – and more! Here are our programs:

CORE

Supplemental education in Spanish, English, Math and other fundamental subjects.

CO-REQUISITES

1. **Basic nutrition** one banana, one balanced meal, and one vitamin per day.
2. **School supplies and uniforms** through scholastic rewards and sponsorship programs.
3. **Positive environment** for building trust and learning: sports, field trips, fun activities, emphasis on positive peer relations.
4. **Good health** with annual and semi-annual health and dental checks.
5. **Socialization** etiquette, neatness, cleanliness, principles such as honesty and respect.



I am touched by the well-rounded approach [Education Plus is] using to fully support these children. It's not just about fulfilling a basic need, but infusing positive encouragement and possibility for a brighter future.

- International Living writer Emily Shea



Learning English in Nicaragua

The tourism industry has become a major employer of young, bilingual Nicaraguans. The Nicaraguan Tourism Board reports a 65% increase in tourism revenue from 2007 to 2012, allowing more young Nicaraguans to cash in on new job opportunities that previously did not exist here.

But in a competitive job market—77% of Nicaraguans are below the age of 39—many young Nicaraguans say they need to learn English to stand out of the crowd.

“For young people, if you can’t speak English, there’s no opportunity in Nicaragua,” said Marcelino Zamora, a 22-year-old San Juan del Sur native who studies English in Rivas.

Zamora said many of his friends work in construction, as vendors or repairmen, but he wants to break through the glass ceiling to become a business administrator or work for a call center.

The outsourcing of U.S. customer-service jobs to near-shore countries such as Nicaragua has led to a boon in office jobs in Nicaragua. The call centers have provided more than just steady work; the higher salaries have created the beginnings of a new and independent middleclass in a country with an enormous gap between the few rich and majority poor.

Marlon Saenz, a 22-year-old Ciudad Sandino native, says learning English as a second language is key to tapping into emerging job markets in Nicaragua. “Now there are more opportunities to work in Nicaragua than there were in the past, but learning English opens the doors to these opportunities,” he says.

- Nicaraguan Dispatch,
June/July 2013

EDUCATION

Barrio Pantanal is unique because of its proximity to the #1 tourist destination in Nicaragua – the city of Granada. Thus there huge local opportunity: for the uneducated as beggars, drug dealers, pick-pockets and prostitutes; for the educated and bilingual working in a variety of professional capacities in a growing economy. Which of these paths the children embark upon will be based upon the educational opportunities given to them during their childhoods.



The children are so full of love, life and appreciation, even in the midst of such poverty and tragedy. Their eagerness to learn is so endearing.

- Andrea, former volunteer, Kansas (pictured above)

Learning at Casa de los Sueños

13 classes take place Monday through Thursday from 9:00 am until 4:00 pm. Our students ages 4 – 16 are broken up into groups based on age and literacy levels. Most students study for two hours a day with us. We focus on three main components:

Supplementary Education While public school is free for all, the Nicaraguan government spends only 3.4% of GDP on education and school lasts just a few hours a day. Many children are passed on year after year even though they cannot read. Our main goal is to fill in the resulting learning gaps, ensuring that all students receive classes in Spanish literacy, math and other fundamentals in a way that keeps them engaged and excited about learning.

English Our most in demand offerings are our 7 classes focus on teaching the children how to read, write and speak English. Besides being fun to learn, most students from an early age are aware this skill can open opportunities for them in the future (see side box).



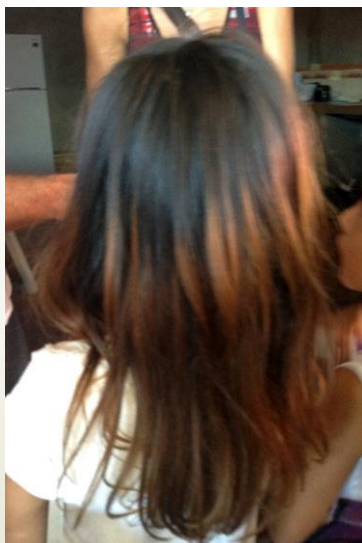
Older students mentor our younger students. Katerin Andino (15) teaches preschoolers shapes and colors.

School Supplies The #1 reason Nicaraguan children have the highest primary school dropout rate in Latin America is because they cannot afford school supplies. Our students have a chance to “earn” the school supplies they need to attend public school through completing homework, doing well on exams, and having perfect attendance.

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE SIGNS OF MALNUTRITION?

Malnutrition results when students do not receive proper nutrition in their diets. A majority of the children in our community come from extremely poor households and thus subsist on very simple rice-based diets. Some may not eat for days at a time.

Many of the children who come to us suffer from malnutrition resulting in a lack of energy to the point of falling asleep in class, having unnaturally lightened hair pigmentation (a result of protein deficiency), and mental and physical stunting. To combat the epidemic of malnutrition in our community, all of the students that attend CDS receive a minimum of one nutritious meal per day, as well as a piece of fruit before the beginning of class to ensure they have the energy to study. Children 6 and under also receive a multi-vitamin before class.



The changes in Karen (6) are obvious after 3 months of attending CDS, where she receives a daily meal, piece of fruit and multi-vitamin

Nutrition and Health

It has been Education Plus's dream to provide every child who attends our program with a meal, as we believe that access to food is a basic human right and that no child should suffer from preventable hunger. Not only this, but eliminating malnutrition has the following far-reaching benefits:

1. **Increases class attendance and performance in three ways** - students have more energy to study since they are provided with a piece of fruit before class, the meal after class is a highly motivating incentive to participate in our program, and providing food helps keep students from being sent out into the streets in order to "earn their keep".
2. **Fights drug addiction** as many children who have nothing to eat turn to sniffing glue as a way to blunt hunger pangs. Glue sniffing is a huge problem among street children in Granada and can be seen daily on the streets.
3. **Improved behavior** as we run our meal program in a way that ensures that children learn to say please and thank you, not to throw food or trash on the ground, and not to steal food or break other school rules.

In addition to providing a daily nutritious meal, Education Plus Nicaragua's partner Bless Back Worldwide visits CDS twice a year to do medical check-ups on the children and provide medications if needed. We keep ongoing medical records of our students.



Education Plus Clubs



Math Club

Student led club meets twice a week to help each other with math homework. Older students teach younger children math basics. Our most popular club.

Reading Club

Student led club meets once a week to read books together and to write book reports.

Dance Club

This fun club meets twice a week to dance salsa, tango, bachata, cumbia, folklore and reggaeton (pictured above).

Track and Field

This club meets once a week to run and compete in traditional team activities like relay races and sprints.

Justice League

This group meets once a week to do team building activities and to discuss themes such as peer relations and justice in the community.

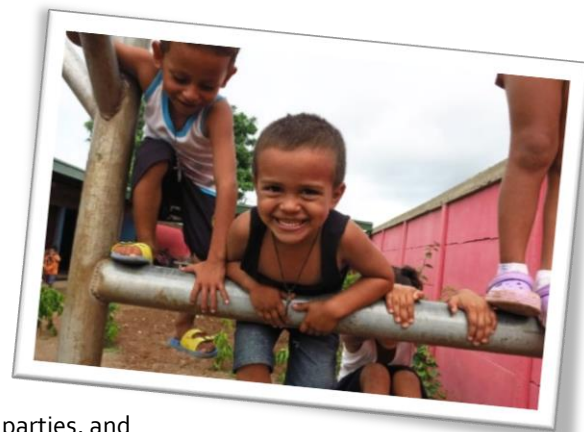
Soccer Club

Coming Next !



Development

The personal growth and development of our students is very important to us at Education Plus. This is why we engage in a host of different developmental activities, providing guidance, and teaching life skills. At CDS we teach the children manners and how to interact in a positive and respectful way with each other. We also host activities such as art projects, holiday parties, and field trips. **Every Friday is a dedicated Activity Day.** We make sure that the kids have a fun time on a consistent basis, including daily playtime on our playground, which is both important for general development and is a key element in our battle to keep the kids off of the streets.



"Seeing the kids smiling, laughing and playing is one of the best things. They have nothing, really nothing in El Pantanal, "the lost barrio" of Granada – but they have each other and Education Plus." – Anja, volunteer, Germany

By expanding their horizons we show our students that there is more to the world than the barrio, motivating them to study and allowing them to dream of a brighter future.



Our Values

Painted on our walls and recited by our children, taught by our teachers and practiced by our staff, is our belief in the importance of God, family, listening, honesty, respect, sharing, self-improvement, laughter, dreams, happiness, and love. These are not only the values we teach our students but also the values Education Plus has been built on.

Looking Ahead

Our Goals

1. **To expand class offerings** for our current students, especially secondary support and university entrance exam prep.
2. **To provide scholarships** to University for our top performing students.
3. **To expand extracurricular activities** both in the afternoons and for full days on Saturdays.
4. **To establish a computer lab** in order to teach computer science and so that students have a place where they can do research.

Challenges

1. **Overwhelming demand** in the community for our services – one space for every 40 children in need.
2. **Funding** – donors prefer to invest in capital projects when operating expenses such as teachers, local staff and a social worker are our greatest needs.
3. Many **children come to us already suffering** from years of neglect and/or abuse.
4. **Community security** – the school is located in the most dangerous barrio in the department of Granada, and while we have to be located within this area so that the

children can get to us on foot, it is not safe for the children outside of our walls.

Strengths

1. **Deep community legitimacy** – we began at a local home and continue to work hand in hand and face to face with the local community.
2. **Parent buy-in** – a larger than average percentage of the parents that send their children to our program value education and their children's futures. Monthly staff/parents meetings ensure that parents are updated on expectations and their voices are heard.
3. **Strong reputation** among volunteers and relationships with partner organizations (Proyecto Mosaico, Samaritan's International, SG Foundation, more).
4. **Free and clear ownership** of land and building.
5. **Low operating costs** – aprox. \$30/month per child.
6. **Politically secure country with nationwide opportunity:** both good universities and jobs for those with an education.
7. **Long-term commitment** by team of in-country administrators and board members.



Martha Urbina cuts the ribbon at the opening of Casa de los Suenos, June 16, 2014



Final Note

These are the forgotten children, the children who no one else cared about. The children that quietly languished in the shadows, hungry and slowly dropping out of school, one by one. The children of Pantanal are the ones that tourists see as annoying street beggars or sad, hopeless causes. But they are not hopeless. They are beautiful souls that desire so much to learn. They are bright children that beg for homework. They are the children that plead for just one more banana because they don't know when they will eat again. But when they have food and love, they dance and laugh and sing like all other children across the world. These are the children that we have sworn to never let fall in the shadows ever again.

Serving these amazing children is truly a humbling privilege.

TOGETHER WE CAN ALTER THE COURSE OF THESE CHILDREN'S LIVES – PERMANENTLY.

Many thanks to our Key Partners Casa del Agua, Neighbors to Nicaragua, PriceSmart Charities, Proyecto Mosaico, Samaritan's International, and SG Foundation. Without you, we would not be able to do the work that we do.



Student Eco Day

The Executive Team



Monica Loveley, Founder and Executive Director

Monica is a dynamic leader with over six years' experience in non-profit management, international organizations, partnership building, fundraising, program development and marketing. She is professionally trilingual and skilled in managing projects, motivating personnel, and achieving results in high stress environments. Past organizations she has worked for include the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs, the United Nations Institute of Training and Research, Action Against Hunger, McKinsey and Company, More Than Me Foundation, and the Weidemann Foundation. She holds a Masters in Global and International Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a Bachelors in French from The College of William and Mary. She originally volunteered at a pre-school in Pantanal before meeting the Castillo family.



Jim Durham, Co-founder and Development Director

Jim has worked for several child and youth oriented organizations, including Barrio La Planta Project in Nicaragua, TeethSavers International, Pace Center for Girls Florida, and Babies in Need. He was formerly a Case Manager for Covenant House Florida, where he received hundreds of hours of social work training and spent several years counseling at-risk children and their families. Jim considers his work with Education Plus to be his calling. He feels humbled and privileged to serve these special children and is dedicated to their future success. Jim studied journalism at the University of Georgia.



The Castillo Family, Community Partners

The Urbina Castillo Family consists of three generations of trusted and respected local community members. They are the core of our team and the reason Education Plus was able to come into being, having hosted the program in their home when we first started. Besides opening their hearts and their doors to the community's children, they also worked as volunteers to cook food for the children for several months when we first started. The heads of the family, and our community advisors, are Board members Marta Urbina and Johnny Castillo. We currently employ their daughter Yamileth as our cook, their son Winston as the school night guard, his wife Yessenia as our cleaning person, and all members of the family participate in a volunteer capacity with major school activities. Education Plus would not exist as it does today without the help of this exceptional and giving family.

We are grateful to our local Board of Directors for their countless hours of selfless service
Maycol Garcia, President David Jaén, Secretary Chris Allodi, Treasurer

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Pantanal, Nicaragua

De la Marucha 200 metros al Oeste

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Contact us at:

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ⁱ Nicaraguan Ministry of Family, 2013 and Department of Granada National Police

ⁱⁱ UNDP 2014

ⁱⁱⁱ CID Gallup May 2013

^{iv} CID Gallup May 2013

^v Of children ages 6 and up who do not move away from the community and who have been with us a minimum of 3 months