

2010 Community Service Trip - Montelimar

Update on our Partnership: The Study & The Diria Institute

Welcome to the first Nicaragua Project Newsletter! The idea for this newsletter came from students who have gone on the trip. This will hopefully be the first of many newsletters that I will be sending you as update on our Nicaragua initiative. As you know, our partnership has developed into three distinct endeavours: a scholarship program, a yearly school improvement and a community service trip to Nicaragua. This first newsletter, although a bit long, will give everyone an update on the work we have been able to accomplish over the years.

Of course, I can't possibly write about Nicaragua without giving a huge shoutout to Sofia Essayan-Perez. Her tireless work on this project, along with the support of her family, has helped ensure its continuity.

In 2018, we applied for and were awarded the Moulton Student Global Citizenship Grant (\$1000) by the National Coalition of Girls' Schools. We were able to use the money to open our Vocational Center at the Diria Institute.

In 2018, the Nicaragua Initiative was chosen as a community partner by Sparkfun. The award allowed us to choose \$700 worth of electronic goods for our new Vocational Center. (<https://www.sparkfun.com/news/2637>)

News

Arturo, the Phys Ed teacher, is no longer at the school. He left in 2020. He's currently working at his own cement company.

Sofia's grandparents are safe and keeping well during the pandemic.

Because of the changes we have made at the Diria Institute, the school has been recognized as a "model school" for the region.



A mural painted by Krystal Assaly (2018 trip)

Pillar #1:

Changing the World One Girl at a time

As you know, we offer a full scholarship to a graduating female student of the Diria Institute to go to university. The scholarship is for \$5000 US and covers their 5-year undergraduate degree including tuition, transportation, books and lunches. Students at The Study are responsible to raise the funds needed to send these girls to school and to choose the recipient of the yearly scholarship award. A qualitative and quantitative approach is taken on three categories: grades, community service and degree of poverty. The applicants submit a written application and answer specific questions, which are then read by the student selection committee.

9 have graduated

- 1 Economist (Bernarda)
- 2 Medical Doctors (Maria Gabriela & Valeria)
- 1 Nurse Practitioner (Geysel)
- 1 Nutritionist (Maria Jose)
- 1 Accountant (Cindy)
- 1 Psychologist (Ethel)
- 1 Surgical Technician (Jennifer)
- 1 Nursing Technician (Shirley)

8 are current university students

- 3 in Medicine (Belkis, Ashley, Angela)
- 2 in Engineering (Francis, Maria Celeste)
- 1 in Dentistry (Jilmara)
- 1 in Nursing (Estefania)

I am including an update on some of the girls.

VALERIA RIVAS, GRADUATE IN MEDICINE (2020)

Valeria just graduated with top grades in Medicine. She is interested in pursuing Internal Medicine. Valeria will be performing 2 years of mandatory medical service in rural areas of Nicaragua where there are no doctors, before pursuing residency.

ETHEL ALEMAN, GRADUATE IN PSYCHOLOGY (2020)

Ethel plans on pursuing a career as an educational psychologist and wants to work in the public school system to help struggling students. She is conducting her thesis research on students at the Diria Institute High School to gain data on different learning styles.



Valeria in the operating room.



Valeria with her graduating class.



Ethel presenting her work on mental health effects of COVID19



Estefania, at the hospital and in school.

ESTEFANIA CANALES, NURSING (CLASS OF 2021)

Estefania is the top Nursing student and Class President of her Nursing Class. She specializes in the Maternal-Infant Health track. Estefania lives in Los Jirones, a remote village about 40 minutes by foot from Diriá, with no medical professionals. Every day she travels 5 hours in order to reach the National University.

When she graduates, she will become the primary breadwinner to support her mother and two younger sisters, as her father passed away in an accident two years ago.



BELKIS CALDERON, MEDICINE (CLASS OF 2021)

Belkis participates in vaccine brigades, going to low-income areas to vaccinate children. She volunteers at the Diriá health clinic, which is the main public clinic that serves her village and is currently rotating through Surgery and Dermatology departments of hospitals in Managua.



Belkis at the Diriá health clinic (left) and during vaccine brigades (right)

ASHLEY MENDOZA, MEDICINE (CLASS OF 2022)

Ashley is highly involved in community service initiatives and medical brigades with her university classmates. She is interested in pursuing pediatrics.



Ashley measuring vital signs and child development markers during medical brigades

CANDELARIA JAEN, BANKING AND FINANCE (CLASS OF 2021)

Candelaria comes from one of the poorest families in Diriá. Her parents work in the fields and have unstable income, making it very hard to support their five children. She aspires to become an Investigative Auditor to tackle corruption.



JILMARA HERRERA, DENTISTRY (CLASS OF 2023)

Each year there are only 10 spots in Dentistry at the National University, and Jilmara earned one. She worked on a team that developed a low-cost air compressor for dentists. It was made of recycled materials and won at the University-wide research fair in the Biophysics category.



Jilmara learns to make dental impressions



**ANGELA DOMINGUEZ,
MEDICINE (CLASS OF 2023)**

Angela comes from Palo Quemado, a small town that is very rural (about 1 hour from Diria), where there are no medical professionals. (She lives near the Anne Frank School). When she graduates, she will be the first resident/local doctor for her community. Angela wants to pursue Pediatrics.

Angela volunteering at her community's medical outpost



**FRANCIS RIVAS,
COMPUTER SCIENCE
ENGINEERING (CLASS OF 2024)**

Francis is the first female student in the town of Diria to pursue a Computer Science degree at the University level. She has completed her first year and is currently learning programming.



**MARIA CELESTE RIVERA,
CIVIL ENGINEERING
(CLASS OF 2024)**

During her last year in high school, Maria Celeste won the Diria High School-level, municipality-level, and regional-level "Best Student Competition" in 2019. She currently has completed her first year of university.

**SHIRLEY CARDENAS, GRADUATE IN
NURSING TECHNICIAN (CLASS OF 2020)**

Shirley and her twin sister Jennifer pursued 1.5-year technical degrees due to their family's dire financial situation (single mother, no other income)

Shirley will now enter the workforce as a Nursing Technician to help support her family.



Shirley (third from left) on her graduation day.

**JENNIFER CARDENAS, GRADUATE IN OR/
SURGICAL TECHNICIAN (CLASS OF 2020)**

She and her twin sister pursued 1.5-year technical degrees due to their family's dire financial situation (single mother, no other income)

Will now enter the workforce as a Surgical Technician to help support her family.



Jennifer conducting community service at the Diria Institute High School

CINDY SELVA, GRADUATE IN BANKING AND FINANCE (CLASS OF 2016)

Cindy studied Banking and Finance at the National University in Managua (UNAN). She graduated with 3 job offers. Cindy also obtained one of the highest grades for her Undergraduate Thesis (92%). Upon graduation, Cindy was hired by the largest microfinance network in Nicaragua after a rigorous selection process.



GEYSEL ALGUERA, GRADUATE IN NURSING (CLASS OF 2017)

Geysel studied Nursing at the National University in Managua (UNAN) where she specialized in the Maternal-Fetal Health track. Geysel earned the UNAN's most prestigious research award on the following topic: preventative health services in sex workers of Nicaragua. She published her award-winning research. Geysel was hired by the newest public hospital in Nicaragua, where she is working in the Labor & Delivery Department.



Geysel and her team presenting their research project



Geysel with her Nursing advisor on her graduation day



Geysel with her Nursing professor

MARIA JOSE QUINTO, GRADUATE IN NUTRITION (CLASS OF 2018)

Maria Jose studied Nutrition at the National University (UNAN). She was selected among the top students in her program to do advanced clinical work as a nutritionist in hospitals across Managua. She worked with the Pan-American Health Organization and plans to pursue further studies in her area or other medical fields.



Maria Jose teaching children about healthy foods.

Spotlight Bernarda Aleman Urbina

As the first two ever recipients of the Study's scholarship, I wanted to highlight the accomplishments of Bernarda Aleman Urbina and Maria Gabriella Echaverry. In many ways, they serve as the beacons for what the scholarship can do and how life changing an education can become.

BERNARDA ALEMAN URBINA, ECONOMICS (CLASS OF 2015)

Bernarda studied Economics at the National University in Managua. She graduated as the best student in her university class. While at university, Bernarda was a teaching assistant for five different courses. Today, she currently works in the Finance and Administration Departments of HMVP, the largest private hospital in Nicaragua. She is making a good salary with benefits (social security, healthcare and even has lunches provided).

Bernarda comes from a family of farmers, and is the first in her family to obtain a university degree. Her parents work in the fields surrounding their home, which is 1 hour away from the high school by foot. Bernarda used to walk to the Diria Institute high school rain or shine, and also had 4 extra hours of transportation throughout her university studies in order to go to and from her university in Managua.

Because of her hard work, Bernarda is helping her family build a home made out of cement. As many of us remember, Bernarda's home used to be made of tin, plywood and garbage bags.



Spotlight Dr. Maria Gabriella Echaverry

MARIA GABRIELLA ECHAVERRY, MEDICINE (CLASS OF 2015)

Maria Gabriella studied Medicine at the National University in Managua (UNAN). She was among the top 5 graduating students in her class. Maria Gabriella conducted two years of mandatory medical service in a public or rural hospital (Public Hospital in Jinotega and Granada's Japan-Nicaragua Hospital). She is currently a resident in Pediatrics at the main pediatric hospital in Managua.



Maria Gabriella is earning a great salary with benefits. She has been slowly redoing the family home which she shares with her single mom.



Maria Gabriella's home the year she won the scholarship.



Her home today: a repaired roof, the facade of the house has been painted and metal gates on the windows for protection.



The inside of the home in 2010. Dirt floors, the mom had borrowed chairs from the neighbours so we could have somewhere to sit. There was one light bulb in the house and it was over Maria Gabriella's bed so that she could study.



Repaired roof, dining table instead of hammock, tile floors instead of dirt.



Interior of the home in 2010.



New furniture and walls and real doors instead of plastic.

Pillar #2:

School Improvements

The aim of our yearly school improvements is to be able to improve The Diria Institute in order to have an impact on the education of every student who attends the school. Over the years, we have accomplished a great deal.

2010

Provided funds to build a water tower and repair the existing water tower

Donated sporting equipment

Provided funds to build the backings of the basketball nets and provided the soccer team with backings for their nets.



2011

Provided each class with a classroom set of books.

Supported the painting of a mural to signify the friendship between our two schools.

Provided enough microscopes, beakers and test tubes to outfit a new science lab.

2012 (The theme in 2012 was "The Arts")

Outfitted the school with enough musical instruments to outfit a band.

Bought the theater department costumes.

Bought art supplies.

Provided over 50 students brand new shoes.



2013

Funded a science lab for our sister school.

Hired a marimba teacher to teach students their traditional musical instrument.



2014 (The theme in 2014 was technology)

Supplied the school with a dozen laptops, projector, printer and e-readers.

Continued to support the marimba teacher.

Provided 80 students brand new shoes.



2015

Continued to support the marimba teacher.

Hired tutors for the senior class to help them prepare for the university entrance exams. This offered students the chance to apply for other scholarships.

2016 (The theme this year was general school supplies)

Provided classrooms sets of books for various classes.

Allowed us to purchase phys ed supplies including enough supplies to equip a baseball team (balls, bats, gloves, protectors, hats, t-shirts)

Provided supplies for the art department (paint, brushes, glue, paper, erasers, pencils, crayons)

Provided supplies for the math department (35 scientific calculators, 30 geometry sets)

Provided supplies for the science department (6 electronic scales, a dummy with pull out organs, test tube racks, LEDs, battery holders, resistors, motors, alligator clips, single throw switches, buzzers, flasks)

Provided funds to repair the multi-purpose court.

Funded the location change of a water tower to the lower part of the school, so that water can be more accessible.

Allowed them to repair the bathrooms.

Provided funds to allow them to purchase supplies to create 10 dancing outfits, supplies for the vocational department (hose, rakes), cleaning supplies for the school.

Continued to support a marimba teacher.

Allowed us to provide each student and staff member a t-shirt, pen and toothbrush.



2017

Continued to support a marimba teacher.

Hired tutors for the senior class to help them prepare for the university entrance exams. This will offer students the chance to apply for other scholarships.

2018

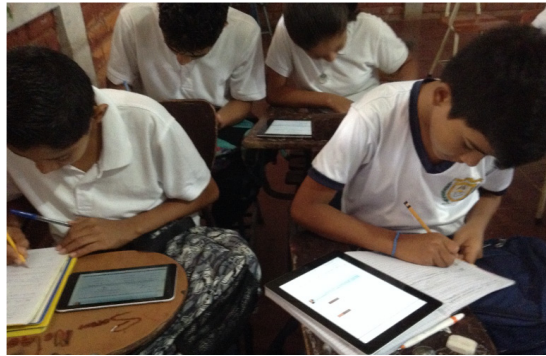
Provided the funds to create a vocational center
Allowed us to provide the school with iPads

2019

Supported the purchase of Arts and Crafts Supplies, English textbooks and Math Supplies

2020

Provided funding for an Audio system and additional required School Supplies



Pillar #3:

Community Service Trips

As you all know, the aim of the community service trip is to allow students at The Study to witness first-hand the impact they have had on this community. Since 2010, 82 Study students have had the opportunity to visit our sister school in Diria. When it's safe to travel again, we hope to go back. Until then, I thought that you might enjoy these photos.

2010



2011



2012



2014



2016



2018



frequent

Have we made any changes to the partnership?

Sure. As the partnership continues, we learn along the way. Two such changes come to mind. When Bernarda graduated, she was having trouble finding a job. This was a student who graduated at the top of her class, with accolades and references from every class she took. We were trying to give her some advice on how and where to apply and then we eventually got to the truth of the matter. We were recommending that she apply to banks, NGOs and the such only to discover that she could not afford to photocopy her CV and to go to travel to an interview. Since then, we offer each graduate an extra month's stipend (\$100) so that they can photocopy CVs, buy appropriate clothing for an interview and afford to take transportation to an interview. As each girl graduates, we offer advice and write letters of reference. In the last few years, when we go down for our community service trip, we also invite the girls and their families out to lunch to celebrate their graduation.

Another major change we made was prompted by Valeria. When Valeria graduated from the Diria Institute, she had the highest marks we had seen up until that point. Valeria originally applied for medicine and was refused. Her first year at university, Valeria studied nursing. The reason she did not get into medicine was because she had trouble with the entrance exam. Because of Valeria, we now hire two tutors who help the students prepare for the entrance exam. We asked Valeria to reapply to medicine and we provided her with the tutoring. She graduated this year in medicine with top grades.

Has everyone who started the scholarship program finished their full five year program?

Unfortunately, no. One such example is Iveth. Iveth was our 2018 scholarship recipient. She successfully completed her first year at university. In 2019, Nicaragua was going through some political upheaval. Iveth's father is ill and cannot work. During this time, her parents decided to move to Costa Rica so that her mom could work as a domestic. Iveth went with her family. We kept her spot open for her in case the family decided to return. They did come back and Iveth went back to school in 2020 for the first term. Unfortunately, her mom took sick which meant that no one in the family was working. Iveth went to Costa Rica to work for her family. We tried to help but as Iveth said, she was tired of going to bed hungry. We continue to keep her spot open for her and hope that she can one day return.

When the students encounter problems, we try the best that we can to help. For example, when Estefania's father died, she was considering leaving school. Estefania lives in a remote area (more remote than even Bernarda). Her father would meet her halfway and walk with her for her own safety. When her dad died, she lost that protection. We arranged for some extra money so that she could take a taxi when she finished school too late in the evening. She graduates this year as the top student and class president.

If the program has been running for 10 years, and we choose one girl a year to go to school, how do we have 17 students in our scholarship program?

The answer is simple. It's all due to the generosity of The Study Community (students, grads, parents and staff). Many times a family will come forward and offer to sponsor a student. There are times where I have reached out for help in the years when I see multiple worthy candidates. The generosity of our community and their commitment to this project never cease to amaze me.

What are you most proud of with regards to this partnership?

I really can't pinpoint one achievement. Here are a few things...

Achievement 1

At the university, in the field of medicine, there is only one spot made available every year for the state of Granada. That's like saying that McGill will only accept one student in medicine from Montreal. In the last ten years, our scholarship winners have claimed 5 out of the 10 available spots.

question

Unasked

Achievement 2

Seeing where our scholarship winners live, knowing the abject poverty they come from and seeing the determination in their eyes to make not just their lives better but to improve the lives of their families and communities encourages us and reinforces the value of this project. Estefania will become the main bread winner in her family, Geysel will help her little sister go to school, Bernarda is helping her entire family.....each girl will change the lives of her family. We have, in effect, started a change in not just one person's life but a change that will be generational.

Achievement 3

I am always so pleased by impact the community service trip has had on each Study girl who goes to Nicaragua. Each girl is impacted in one way or other on this trip. What I find so rewarding is seeing a student finally find her voice by experiencing this trip of service and fellowship.

How many shoes have we bought over the years?

Early on, we discovered that there were students who did not go to school because they did not own a pair of shoes. Over the years, we have provided over 300 brand new pair of shoes for students. During our last trip, we also bought every staff member a pair of shoes. This was all thanks in large part to the efforts of Jamie Shore (2018 trip), who initiated this aspect of our giving way back in 2012.

Another unique effort was the donation of eye glasses by Chloe Mass (2016 trip) and Vivian Mass (2018 trip). 40 pairs of self adjusting eye glasses were brought to Nicaragua and given to students who were in much need of visual support to help them succeed, both at school and in their daily lives. After getting a pair of glasses, one student remarked: "I didn't know that reading wasn't supposed to hurt."

Do we still see Elsa?

You bet. Visiting Elsa has become a mainstay of our trip.

Do we still engage as many Study students as possible in this project?

Absolutely, from Open your Heart day activities, to Scholarship Selection Committees, our goal continues to be one that engages our entire community in this project. We have even had, in recent years, the opportunity of having scholarship winners Skype into assemblies.

Even if I graduated, can I still help?

Of course. We can always use help either in raising funds or buying materials on the years that we go down for the community service trip. Feel free to reach out, if you want to know how to help: amalia@thestudy.qc.ca

If you educate a man you educate an individual, if you educate a woman you educate a nation

African Proverb