

Building a More Beautiful World From the Bottom Up



Karitas is about envisioning a new way to live together. Every project has core values of relationship, sustainability, and community direction.

The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible, a book by Charles Eisenstein, argues that our hearts instinctively glimpse that there is another way. We know this more beautiful world because we see it in small but magnificent manifestations today. We increasingly realize that the way humanity is inhabiting the Earth is unsustainable. Technologies exist to change this, yet the debates make clear that we have no idea about how to go about it.

Karitas and our partners believe we are building this new future from the ground up. Are these models too small and slow to save our planet and all of life? Perhaps. Our hope is that as the cracks in the present structures widen, these alternatives will be there, ready.

“You never change things by fighting the existing reality,” observed Buckminster Fuller. “To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” These short reports focus on fresh, redemptive aspects of these innovative community projects that lead us toward the world we know is possible. These are stories to infuse hope.

(To see stats, numbers, and measurable progress indicators, visit our website:
www.karitasfoundation.org)



La Estación, Celebrating 20 Years!

La Estación, the marginal land around the impoverished and abandoned train center of Cuernavaca, is home to almost 10,000 people who migrated from poor rural areas. Twenty years ago, Karitas helped launch a community center and breakfast program, and supported the Maria Ines kindergarten. A generation later, the fruits are astounding.

Then, there were virtually no college graduates in the community. Many residents had not completed elementary school. Today, many young people are in college or have graduated. The breakfast program feeds 150 kids each day, coordinated and operated by teams of mothers. The community center is a safe space for mothers, dads, and their children to act on their dreams. Workshops of all types are offered: music, arts and crafts, trauma management, nutrition, and more.

Recently we discussed what La Estación might look like in ten years. After what has been done, so much seems possible! The center, breakfast, and school represent an anchor of love, mutual commitment, and wisdom in a community with a history of violence and drug addiction. It has been transformative. Fresvinda, the project coordinator, observed, “When you see someone like Doña Isabel, a woman who has suffered so much discrimination and violence, come in with her granddaughter and treat her with such love and care, you know a different future is possible.”

ALEM: Jazzing the World



ALEM is a collective of wheelchair users who have learned to repair wheelchairs for others—now 14 years old. Previously, wheelchair repair (we call it “jazzing up chairs”) was next to impossible.

ALEM was the Karitas project most challenged by the pandemic. We were able to do only a handful of our on-the-road repair clinics. (Organized and hosted by local Rotary Clubs, in 2019, we did 22 clinics over 6 states, repairing 3500 wheelchairs.) This forced ALEM to reinvent itself, bringing 2300 chairs in to the shop. By 2022, it hopes to train a team to do the same thing in Mexico City.

“In times of despair, watching you work to repair our wheelchairs is a breath of fresh air,” commented a participant at our clinic in the city of Puebla. “Thank you for showing us that dreams do come true,” That October day, ALEM restored 195 wheelchairs.

ALEM is about coming together, bringing out the best in each other, listening to one another, and working for a common goal. Each person in the collective has a voice, work and recognition. To build a hopeful world, we must all learn what ALEM knows: When we embrace each other--not because we are equal, but because we are totally different--anything is possible. People in wheelchairs jazzing up the world.

Education Initiative

The Education Initiative, seven years old, has been an incredible success. Each year, 30 students from two vulnerable communities continue their education beyond elementary school with tutoring, a stipend, extracurricular activities, and counseling. Participants are not chosen simply by grade average, but also by their commitment to their community. The initiative is run by two organizations with long presence in each community.

Site 1: Caminando Unidos

“The pandemic is a call to consciousness,” says Lucia, a founder of Caminando Unidos, our Cuernavaca partner in a variety of social welfare programs for families facing violence and marginalization.

During the pandemic the community talked through the fear in order to not succumb to it. Survival depended on drawing socially closer while physically distancing. They practiced self-care with a collective twist: one could not care for oneself without support and coordination from your community. Self-care meant conscious nutrition, conscious ways of being in relationship, and conscious love. Initially, this played out in food baskets and a collectively compiled recipe

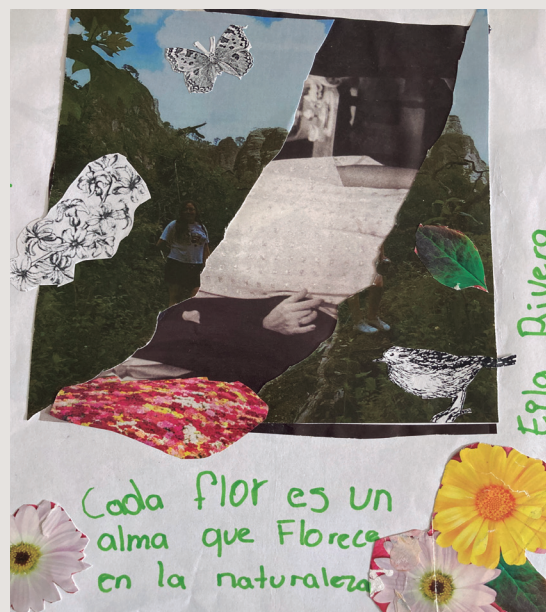
book distributed through the community. Later, the group leaders developed workbooks of home activities.

Founders Lucia and Arlette point to the expanding leadership of students who have come through the program. “People turn to them when issues arise in the community. Within CU, they are group leaders and social entrepreneurs. If we disappeared, the project would continue!”

Site 2: La Jugarreta

La Jugarreta coordinates the education program in Tepoztlán, a small mountain village. In addition to the 15 students in middle school, they support four students through high school. During COVID-19, students found it difficult to adapt to online education. With La Jugarreta’s one-on-one tutoring and counseling, some students who had been challenged even when school was in person were able to succeed in online learning, a source of tremendous pride.

“These are challenging times, but our students have risen to the challenge, choosing collective resilience over individual despair. We are stronger because of this.” comments Mercedes of the La Jugarreta staff.



Resiliente: A Place to Eat and Dream

Eighty families work fields surrounding a migrant center in Southern Morelos, a converted warehouse where they live. They work in horrible conditions with tremendous sacrifice to keep their families alive.

The facility is an oasis of color and joy—a low-cost cafeteria named Resiliente. The vision of a student collective by the same name, Resiliente is a place workers are fed, but also a place they can talk about their dreams.

Resiliente strives to be totally inclusive, accessible, and sustainable. It practices fair, local trade; and crosses

social, cultural, and economic divides. All the staff have intellectual or auditory disabilities. Resiliente dreams of a world where we want to understand each other and where every voice is heard. As Deby Macedo, a founder of Resiliente, says: “Why does the person with auditory disability make all the effort to communicate? Why don’t we make the same effort?”

Here is a glimpse of the beautiful world we want: A young boy, Jesús, came into the café selling cookies. The staff was concerned for the boy, who they believed should be in school. Marco Santos, another founder of the project, spoke to him and heard the family’s story: living in a train car, working at a bakery, and surviving on the sale of baked goods. Now, Jesús is the official cookie supplier for the café!

Other efforts of Karitas in 2021 include:

Karitas continues to be a model and a facilitator of dialogue across the region on environmental sustainability and grassroots organizing. Last year we:

- *Fostered dialogue on sustainable development in the remote municipality of Axochiapan, Mexico and in Minneapolis, home of thousands of Axochiapan migrants.
- *Consulted and supervised three Rotary-funded rainwater harvest and purification programs in elementary schools in Tepoztlán and Ocuilco serving over 500 students and their families.
- *Continued our food self-sufficiency program with long-term partners Resiliente, Yankuik, and Teocintle.
- *Co-facilitated a visioning process for micro-miners in Ecuador
- *Consulted on recovering the Tuxpan Lagoon in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.
- *Moderated bimonthly meetings with the Sacred Circle of Grandmothers and Grandfathers in Mesoamerica
- *Coordinated the first Latin American pilot of Pachamama Alliance's Community Climate Action Training.
- *Consulted with a group in Colombia who wants to replicate a community foundation like Karitas.
- *Many forums and presentations on community development, social justice, indigenous cosmology, and other themes

Dear Karitas Partners

I have learned a lot about partnership over the last 30 years.

The creation of true partnership is a precious, tender journey. Partnerships begin with trust as the cornerstone of relationship--in individuals, families, communities, and organizations. The people of Mexico are understandably hesitant to trust North Americans. From the outset, Karitas committed to trustworthiness above all. We are now deeply trusted.

Trust-based relationships birth and nurture hope. Hope is the foundation of true transformation. Only with trust and hope in place can partnerships be authentic. In this newsletter, you read stories that are only possible because of years of trust, then hope, and finally, true partnership.

I ask you to give to Karitas--sacrificially and generously. This is worthy work. One doesn't often find organizations which understand their context so well, listen fully, and participate with poor people in the change they want for their communities. The creation of trust and the relationships that Karitas has built all over the region are rare. It is work I believe it's a privilege to share in.

I offer you the privilege of being part of it, with great gratitude for you. May we all be transformed.

Howard



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