



Karitas



Fundación
Comunidad

“Building Bridges, Celebrating Community”

www.karitasfoundation.org

Annual Newsletter

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SAPECO

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Something New

The *Karitas Support Team* includes individuals and organizations with a history of effectiveness in motivating and resourcing Middle School age young people.

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Letter from the President

Dear Partners in Changing Lives,

I went to a seminar recently on strategic planning. I expected to be led through a predictable, tried-and true sequence of focusing vision, setting goals, making plans and then implementing them. A logical and sequential, step-by-step process. With maybe a fresh wrinkle or a new twist. The leader began with what seemed an unusual invitation. “Bring to mind,” he said, “a time in your life, an event, a moment that *made all the difference*, was significantly *life-changing* for you, a true *turning point*. I found myself remembering how I almost did *not* go to church youth camp in 1956, that it was only *by chance* my cousin pointed out the girl playing third base in a softball game . . . who was Betsy, my wife of 52 years! I remembered *bumping into* a colleague who *by chance* told me about a job opening I might be interested in . . . a church I served for 23 remarkable and blessed years. The leader interrupted our quiet reflecting. “How many of those events or moments did you *plan*?” he asked. Murmurs of something like, “oh my, none of them” whispered around the room.

This newsletter brims with remarkable stories in the lives of remarkable people. Vibrant vision and bold dreaming, and the initiative, creativity and determination to “put wheels under those dreams,” as they have come to name it. So the narratives shared in these pages do not feature *us* . . . but *them*. Karitas is there, and so are you, our partners – prayer partners, encouragement partners, some of you financial partners – but partners all. But we are there *with* the people. We walk beside them, but not ahead of them. They take the lead. *We did not “plan” any of it . . . in the traditional sense of planning.*

Space does not allow “telling the stories” of the beginnings and then the remarkable unfolding of our presence and partnership in four, becoming five, perhaps soon to become six major projects



The community of La Estación organized a fair to raise funds and awareness about the activities the women are doing at the community center

in six locations – each having a touching, powerful and wonderfully unlikely “birthing story.” How about these for “founding story” titles: “A Four Foot Piece of Frayed Rope” . . . “A Chance Conversation” . . . “A Stinky Stream” . . . “The Nephew Who Slept under the Steps” (like Harry Potter) . . . “I Think We’re in the Wrong Seminar.” And the birthing stories keep birthing! In each project location the people gather in weekly circles to deepen relationships, report in on how things are going, to share new ideas or fresh opportunities – out of which regularly come “next steps” and new initiatives.

Time does not allow an in-depth profile of our basic approach, our development philosophy, our style of accompaniment, our commitment to “walking together” with the

people. Nothing speaks more clearly of the power and effectiveness of our manner of “being there” than the bright, animated, vibrant faces of the people. An ever deepening sense of dignity and self-worth; an ever expanding capacity to focus dreams of a richer, indeed unimaginable future; an ever emerging confidence in the power of committed people working in concert to claim that future; an ever overflowing joy in seeing possibilities become reality.

Use your imagination as you read these pages – feel the dusty pathways beneath your feet, smell the rich aromas of quesadillas as you wander, tousle the hair of the spirited kids who come to greet you, delight in the deeply lined and wizened faces of seniors, watch Rosie in her wheelchair pulling down her welder’s helmet or Pancho as he deftly re-assembles an automatic transmission. They have a story to tell, appreciation to share, because we are there beside them!

Con carino y abrazos fuertes,
Howard Friend

SAPECO

our micro-economic development program encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit



The minimum wage in Cuernavaca is \$4.25 a day . . . yes, a day! Even working two jobs yields less than \$10. And even those jobs are not easy to find. While Mexico's macro-numbers are encouraging, with new wealth pouring into the economy, life for the poor remains an awesome struggle. And there seem to be few pathways up

and out for so many. Karitas, through SAPECO, is helping young men and women create such pathways.

Beginning with Frisan, a worker/owner transmission repair shop, new coops are formed each year. In the past two years they have grown from eleven to twenty! "Erik trained us, encouraged us, but more important believed in us," Ivan says with pride and appreciation. "We had an idea, and we were becoming good mechanics, but without the financial support of Karitas, it would have remained only that . . . a dream. Now it's real!" Pancho chimes in. "Look around you," invites Yolanda. "I remember when we first opened fifteen years ago. We were a single wall, a flimsy piece of canvas to block the sun and rains, just enough tools and parts to start on those first transmissions. Now look: an office, a customer waiting area and a large shop with a permanent roof, a dozen cars waiting to be repaired." "And it belongs to us!" Ivan cannot resist adding, "with the help of low interest loans from Karitas."

Word got around. That Karitas would "be there" if and when a small team of workers felt ready to become worker/owners. Vicente leased farm land, raised chickens, sold wholesale to restaurants and at his wife, Olimpia's street stand. Two automotive parts stores . . . a torque converter repair shop . . . three more transmission repair businesses . . . the ALEM cooperative . . . three young people in wheelchairs started a small sewing-related store-front just to name a few. Karitas offers ownership readiness training (not only appropriate skillfulness, but the personal traits demanded of a business owner), start-up consultation (financing, location, advertising, tool and parts inventories), and on-going support and availability.

Karitas underwrites a small portion of Erik's salary to provide time spent nurturing and guiding these budding businesspersons, many now solid and successful. He visits regularly and is on call as needed. In part because they help each other. Francisco coaches Chito . . . Rodolfo is on call for Roberto . . . Yolanda visits Patricia . . . Rosy stops by in her wheelchair to inspire Ana Laura, Pablo and Uriel in their wheelchairs.

ALEM

**Autonomia, Libertad en Movimiento
Independence, Freedom through Movement**



"We need a larger push pin map," Lili exclaims, that engaging gleam in her eye, "ALEM is on the road." Still in its first decade, ALEM – a workshop where people with disabilities design and fabricate custom and specialty wheelchairs and offer sorely needed wheelchair repair services – recently registered as a worker/owner cooperative and is moving steadily toward increasing sustainability.

With a grant from Rotary International, that wheelchair repair service has moved 100's of disabled wheelchairs out from the weeds or down from a roof and back on the road. The cost of parts had previously put repair out of reach, but with ALEM's large inventory of discounted parts, charging only for labor, a \$100 plus repair has become \$25-35. "Then we brainstormed together and came up with an idea – let's go 'on the road'," added Rosie with excitement. "So we can make even more people mobile again." That same grant funded the creation of a trailer, packed with tools and parts, that took the repair service "on the road" – with recent trips to three cities in the region. Thus the push pin map.

"But without Karitas none of this would be possible," Alejandro chimes in. "They are our friends and partners. They have shared our dream through their encouragement and generosity." Mayra, the project director, explains that the response to the mobile unit has been so positive, that not only are more towns and cities inviting us, but two have asked if we could help them create a satellite ALEM in their town. "Who can predict what the year ahead will bring?" she adds, excitement beaming from her face. "We are ready to rise to the opportunities and challenges," she adds in a robust tone.

Karitas, partners with ALEM for eight years and more recently with Rotary International, shares the cost with the worker/owners of purchasing and maintaining equipment, a parts inventory, utilities, the technician/bus driver, Pancho's salary (\$9,600 annually) and the director, Mayra Solano's, modest \$16,000 annual salary.



Monthly "Free Fair," Give away what you don't need and take away what you do -- It's Free



La Estación

the station: a huge squatters' settlement in downtown Cuernavaca

When rail service to Cuernavaca ended decades ago, the vast acreage was "claimed" by squatters. "We found bedsprings, scraps of plywood, chunks of cement block, even panels we took out of abandoned railcars and with bailing wire held it all together," boasts Miguel, his body bent with the years but his spirit sturdy and vibrant. Poco a poco housing improved. Irma waves proudly from her simple block home, "Howard and Betsy, come on in for tea." Her neighbor and friend, Maria, joins us. "Now we have running water and electricity . . . well, sometimes," she says. Services are, at best unpredictable and precarious. Irma and Maria's kids are a third generation – these are a hearty, resilient and determined people.

"I love it when we gather in circles and 'tell out stories,'" Lupita says, her eyes dancing. "We are all different, and we have so much in common," adds Rosa. "Like how so many of us return to the farming villages where we were raised to help with planting and harvesting." "I look forward to celebrating each of our home villages' Saint's day right here in La Estacion, especially those wonderful dances," Jose muses. "It makes me proud of my background and my ancestors. And I want the kids to know our stories." "My favorite thing this past year was (what do you call it, Juan Manuel?) 'community mapping,'" adds Ricardo, "when we went as a small group to every part of our community to share what we are doing together with everyone else. We sure made a big map!"

Karitas began active partnership with La Estacion twelve years ago, initial donors helping provide additional classroom space and teachers in the pre-school, raising enrollment from 60 to 150. We assisted the community in reclaiming an abandoned building, installing a kitchen where breakfast was prepared for 125 kids, expanding to 160 when the new community center was completed two years ago (a team of four mothers return from the market at 5 am and prepare a hearty breakfast of eggs, meat, potatoes and fresh juice). "Build it and they will come" + "They keep coming, so let's build it" = a community center, which they designed and for which they raised money. There are programs for kids – tutoring, personal hygiene, psychological coaching and a safe place to gather; and for parents – nutritional meal planning on a limited budget; parenting coaching; work readiness training; "cottage industry" options like moccasin, crafts and doll making to augment family income.

Karitas funds the pre-school (three teacher salaries, supplies, building maintenance), the feeding program (food, supplies, building and equipment maintenance) the programming at the center (trainer/instructor fees, course materials) a fulltime social worker, Fresvinda's \$12,000 salary, and Juan Manuel's \$4,000 half-time salary.

El Texcal

A community comes alive!

"Did it really start with that cloth's line thing?" asks Marta, who we met on an early visit to Texcal, a warm and quizzical look on her face. An unlikely collaboration of a transnational corporation with a handsome factory and the peasant leaders of the community (they shared concern with stream pollution) brought Karitas into what would become an inspiring story. Imagine a CEO with a graduate degree and his management team sitting around a table with minimally educated community elders brainstorming about "their" community!

Juan Manuel, our gifted and creative social worker, led that "cloth's line thing." He found the day, time and location where there is the heaviest foot traffic – and string, a cloth's line, set up like an "E" without the middle line, with ample cloth's pins. Put a pile of craft paper and markers in the center . . . and wait. "And what's this?" asks a passerby. "Can I play?" a six year old chimes in. "Would you draw a picture of your wishes?" Juan Manuel asks. The response is hesitant at first, but soon dozens of people are drawing pictures and hanging them up. Juan Manuel asks one or two artists to interpret their work and soon there is playful competition to claim a chance to share. Alicia says, "I think my wish is like yours, Raquel. I'm going to pin mine to yours." Soon there are three and four drawings clustered. "You know I never knew I *had* wishes," Lucinda quietly, poignantly shares. "But I do!"

Fast forward two years. Following the Karitas' philosophy of inviting people to discern *their* wishes, focus *their* vision, tap *their* intrinsic capacities and then craft *their* plans to "put wheels under their dreams" as one of them named it, there is not space to name all of the projects that have burst forth from that "cloth's line thing." The nature reserve around and old water park generates some tourist income. An old, dark, damp building was perfect for growing mushrooms, regular harvests and learning packaging techniques birthing another mini-business. Wized and wise old-timers, versed in local flora and fauna, lead nature walks for a modest fee. Rooftop, raised bed and box bed gardening are providing healthy green vegetables, feeding families and enough extra for selling. Recycling is catching on, a team is working to take it to the next step. Recycling inspired an idea with a catchy name – "Free-cycling." Simple enough. People bring things they no longer need but are still functional and arrange them on a table or a blanket on the ground. Suddenly the park is bustling, colorful and abundant with stuff. Everyone can shop. Just take what you spot that you need. No cost. No bartering. No trading. Truly *free cycle!* At the end of the day, each household retrieves whatever was not claimed. A sports center, memorial to a U.S. teenager, is being discussed. Residents who were constantly feuding began working together. Community pride blossomed.

Karitas provides a presence of encouragement and support, a half-salary of \$7,500 for Juan Manuel, empowering individual and group initiatives to improve individual, family and community lives and futures, providing modest financial partnership where apt and timely.

Partnership for Enriched Futures

Estela is twelve years-old and is completing elementary school, where she has been a highly motivated and above average student. She stands at a fork in her road. One pathway is, unfortunately, the "road less traveled," moving on to Middle School, then High School and perhaps University. The other pathway, the one more traveled, is to drop out of school and begin to contribute to the family income, selling Chiclets and candy bars in the park or washing windshields at stop lights. That road likely leads to unskilled, minimum-wage work in adulthood, a life of financial struggle. The other road has potential for skilled labor income, possibly university education, a life of financial security.

Twelve year-old Joel lives with his aunt and uncle. He spent much of his life caring for his drug-addicted mother, dragging her home when she passed out, then finding her dead a year ago. Joel, who had never attended a day of school, found his way to Caminando Unidos, not officially a school but authorized by the government to offer primary curriculum. Initially, Joel, needing help to simply survive and remain strong amidst such chaos, gained immediate respect from everyone through his personal charisma and natural leadership. An eager student, he is learning to read, and continues to be an inspiration to other children and the center staff. Like Estella, Joel is at a fork in his road. One day his father arrived at Caminando Unidos screaming a demand that Joel come home, to make drug deliveries on his bicycle, to groom him for life in the drug trade. That's one pathway. Joel looked him right in the eye telling him, "No, I'm staying here." He is, hopefully, ready to choose another pathway.

In the United States the student drop-out issue focuses on the transition from Middle to High School, dropout rates at alarming levels, particularly in city schools. In Mexico the critical transition is from Elementary to Middle School, where the dropout rates are most prevalent and alarming.

Over the last six months we have conducted comprehensive interviews with creative and cutting edge educators and school administrators in Cuernavaca, the greater Philadelphia area and Washington, D.C. We have convened focus groups of students, parents, educators, potential employers and members of our core team in Mexico to more specifically define the need and the dynamics at work. We are convinced we are positioned to create a comprehensive program that can encourage students to make this

critical educational transition. And, most important, we believe the quality of the future lives of these students will be dramatically enhanced.

The *students* must be vigorously committed to diligent study habits, ready to be hard workers, ready to claim their own best future; their *parents* (or parent-figures) need to be a source of steady encouragement and support; the project will develop a personal relationship with *classroom teachers*; and *employers* will provide part-time work with opportunity to teach initial vocational skills, with the wage subsidized by Karitas. The *Karitas Support Team* will include individuals and organizations with a history of experience and effectiveness in motivating and resourcing Middle School age young people.

The project is nearing readiness. We have located two project partners, Caminando Unidos in Cuernavaca and La Jugarreta in Tepotzlan who have a longstanding, trust-based relationship with their communities, particularly families and children, and proven effectiveness in this kind of project. We are preparing a preliminary proposed budget for this program. We anticipate a start-up cost of \$25,000 and a \$100,000 budget for full implementation of the project. There are opportunities to support individual students with whom you can establish a personal relationship. If we subscribe the budget, we are ready to roll!

A Wonderful Challenge

* Karitas' presence in Cuernavaca has passed a "tipping point" and it's about trust. Building trust-based partnerships, is a slow, tedious process. But, we have succeeded! We are widely viewed as compassionate, trust-worthy and committed,

* That yields boundless opportunities to serve: potential new projects and expansion of current ones, all poised to have extraordinary impact on countless lives. If someone wrote a check for a million dollars, we could put every dollar toward effective, life-transforming projects . . . immediately!

Like little waves circling from a stone tossed into a pond – each successive wave is significantly wider and larger than the one before, as each wave had been before that. Karitas began like the splash of a single stone over the two decades ago, its first ripples small and modest. But this year's wave is substantially larger than those earliest ones, even dramatically larger than that of just a year ago! To carry this work to its fullest potential, a larger wave yet, we need a 15% increase in donor income. Rise to our challenge.

Let's Keep in Touch

We want to connect with you in every way possible. Wander our website: review our mission and vision statements, meet our board, watch an extraordinary photo essay about ALEM, and explore opening each project site in turn. We can provide our IRS tax exempt certificate, a copy of our 990 charitable organization filing in Pennsylvania. Or, give Howard Friend a call.

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