

Greetings family and friends,

18 March 2019

Last night we returned from our whirlwind 5 day trip to our project in Bolivia, the first official visit since we incorporated as **Help Bolivia Foundation** in summer 2018. Wow, what an experience! We came home with 4 hours of video, almost 2,000 photos, and a collection of great memories. We spent 3 full days at the project, where the children and their families entered our hearts. We spoke with the educators, the parents, and even the local school Principal. All said the same thing – we are making a difference! This affirmation makes us especially determined to continue to focus on improving the lives of these children. These kids and their families are depending on us. Thank you so much to our donors for your continued support!



Accompanying Matt, our daughter Heidi (who joined the Board in February) and myself was Stephen Marsh, one of **Help Bolivia's** Sustainers, and Christine Bush, one of **Help Bolivia's** Champions. Steve hails from Toronto, and was the eye behind the hours of videos we got, and has/will be spending hours putting various promotional clips together for us. Christine is winding up 3 years of travel in South America, and is moving back to Montreal this month. She will be fundraising for **Help Bolivia** once she is settled. Together we spent a day planning our week, and then



headed to the project!



Our project is a community centre in a rough part of El Alto, the rapidly growing city on the outskirts of La Paz (see photo on the left taken from the roof showing the surroundings). The families that are referred to the Tahuantinsuyo Community Centre (our project) have additional stress in their life. They may have malnourished children, children with learning disabilities, or they may be victims of abandonment or abuse. They may come from single parent households, or be living with domestic violence. Community leaders and the local school identify which families will benefit from the Centre. This year this includes Rosalia, age 45, whom we hired as the cook for the nutrition program. She is a recent widow with 7 children, 5 of whom attend the Centre. She brought us to

visit her home. She rents a 2 room cement shack in the backyard of a homeowner she knows. One room contains two beds, where she sleeps with 6 of her children. The second room contains a bed for her 22 year old, and a small kitchen. The shack is not heated. Outside is a stone oven for making bread. Prior to being hired as our cook, she struggled to feed her family. We have changed the lives of many families like Rosalia's for the better. The increase in attendance in the project is due to the addition of the lunch program and warrants keeping the Nutrition/Lunch Program going.



The children were friendly, curious, and very happy to have us visit. We shared lunch with them all three days and it was apparent that the meal program is a success, and enjoyed by all. They receive snacks in the morning and afternoon as well, which keeps their energy levels high, and improves their performance at school. We saw the learning activities they engage in at the Centre, and even participated in some of them with the children. They definitely found space in our hearts.

On our third and final visit, the mothers (and some fathers) came to have lunch with us. They presented a traditional apthapi, which is like a potluck. Speeches of gratitude were made, which truly touched us, and brought some tears. We also made some new friends! During lunch, the mother



seated beside me said very little. She was dressed all in black, so I suspected something was up. Eventually I turned to her and asked her her name. Imagine my surprise when she said her name was Lidya! Turns out her father had passed away a few days earlier, hence her being all in black, and speaking little. We soon discovered that we each have 3 children, and we both have purple covers for our cell phones. That made her smile. And I realized it's Birth Lottery that had me born in Canada, and her born in Bolivia. Yet another reason why we have chosen to Help these



folks – they are just like us.

Over the next 11 months we will be posting videos and photos on our social media pages and our website, and will include photos and stories in our quarterly newsletters. We know that we have a good project, one that is effecting positive changes to the lives of many families in this community in Bolivia. We are excited to share this with our family and friends. We hope you are excited too.

