

Light of Esperanza

2013 ANNUAL REPORT

PROGRAMMING INFORMATION:

In 2013, Light of Esperanza continued to expand its successful influence and impact on helping to improve the living conditions of the deeply impoverished women and children in rural Honduras.

Light of Esperanza's three main program areas – women's and children's health, education, and self-sufficient cooperative businesses – were all enhanced by new initiatives and exciting partnerships with individuals and organizations from both Honduras and the United States.

WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S HEALTH CARE:

Light of Esperanza is proud to have joined forces in 2013 with the San Francisco-based non-profit organization, Vitamin Angels, in our effort to improve access to health care in rural Honduras. Through a careful analysis of need, Vitamin Angels was able to provide Light of Esperanza with enough prenatal vitamins for a year to all expecting and lactating mothers in the villages surrounding Vega Redonda, Copan, the main area of rural Honduras where Light of Esperanza works. This translated into over 68,000 vitamins that Light of Esperanza delivered to the village health clinic in Vega Redonda. Additionally, to support newly born children and infants, Light of Esperanza acquired 500 Vitamin A capsules from Vitamin Angels. These vitamins will drastically improve the health conditions of pregnant women and their children, as prior to this partnership, most women in this part of rural Honduras received on average only one bottle of prenatal vitamins for the entire duration of their pregnancy.

Another health care initiative for Light of Esperanza in 2013 was delivering hundreds of donated toothbrushes and dental supplies to the children in the three main villages where Light of Esperanza works. Prior to this, very few children were able to access dental care products. Tooth decay is a major health concern in this part of rural Honduras. At an early age, many Honduran youth are experiencing extreme dental problems. Light of Esperanza volunteers provided classes to the youth who received this donation on proper use and dental care.

Light of Esperanza also received a special grant in 2013 to sponsor the purchase of two walkers for two youth from a very impoverished family in Vega Redonda. These teenage youth, who have been crippled from a disease since birth, were able to walk by themselves for the very first time as a result of this donation.

During the 2013 year, Light of Esperanza also initiated the first "Pride in my Village" garbage cleanup in Vega Redonda. Members of the community, organized by Light of Esperanza volunteers, attacked the overwhelming amount of garbage in and around the village. Light of Esperanza volunteers took the garbage to the nearest garbage dump after this daylong event. Thanks to a special grant funding this project, Light of Esperanza plans to hold these village garbage cleanup three times a year, educating members of the community on healthy and sanitary living conditions, and supporting an increase in pride in their village environment.

EDUCATION PROGRAMS

SCHOOL SUPPLIES

As in 2012, Light of Esperanza once again delivered over \$500 of donated school supplies to the youth in the village schools of rural Copan, Honduras. These supplies included notebooks, pens, pencils, crayons, calculators, and rulers. For most of the youth, this is their only opportunity to acquire school supplies. The youth are excited to learn, but lack the tools by which to do so. Light of Esperanza's school supply drive in the United States provides them with the opportunity to accomplish their academic goals.

SCHOOL REHABILITATION PROJECT

In 2013, Light of Esperanza established the Seattle-based public elementary school Mount View Elementary as a sister school to the elementary school in Vega Redonda, Honduras. Seattle students at Mount View Elementary School raised money through a special carnival event to fund a rehabilitation project at the school in Honduras. This project was realized in 2013 as Light of Esperanza volunteers repaired and painted the dilapidated and broken windows, walls and doors at the school in Honduras. This project not only provided the students at the school in Honduras with a new pride in their school, but also gave students at Mount View Elementary the opportunity to educate themselves and others about issues of poverty and how they can be an integral part of helping to improve the lives of others.

COMPUTER CENTER

Another educational project Light of Esperanza engaged in during the 2013 year was the creation of the first computer center in this part of rural Honduras. Joining forces with the Mayor and Municipality of Dolores, Copan, Light of Esperanza worked to build this computer center in Vega Redonda. Light of Esperanza provided five fully-equipped computers with educational programs in English and Spanish for this incredible project of bringing the world of technology to this community for the first time ever. The culmination of this major project was celebrated with a ceremony attended by representatives of the Municipality of Dolores and of the Honduran Education Department.

SCHOLARSHIPS

In order to address the lack of educational opportunities that are available for promising youth after the sixth grade (when free public education terminates in Honduras), Light of Esperanza received a generous grant from the Jewish Helping Hands foundation in New York, to fund two scholarships for youth who would otherwise have been unable to continue their studies after the sixth grade due to a lack of funding. These two youth successfully completed the seventh grade at the neighboring school in Dulce Nombre, Copan, and have an extremely bright future ahead of them thanks to their scholarship.

GIRL'S SOCCER LEAGUE

In 2012, Light of Esperanza started to sponsor two boy's soccer teams who lacked shoes, balls, uniforms, and other necessary supplies to equally compete on the soccer field. In 2013, Light of Esperanza expanded its support of this popular sport by creating the first girl's soccer league in this part of rural Honduras. Light of Esperanza purchased uniforms, balls, and shoes for two girl's teams from Vega Redonda and the village of Dolores. Both the girls and the boys from these two villages, as well as a third village, Limon, joined together in August of 2013 to compete in a Light of Esperanza sponsored soccer tournament, providing a sense of pride and accomplishment for all of those participating. Light of Esperanza was especially proud of its ability to help elevate the girls of the community to equally participate in this activity.

SCHOOL FIELD TRIP TO THE MAYAN RUINS

In 2013, Light of Esperanza sponsored the second year of its annual school field trip to the Mayan ruins at Copan Ruinas. As with the previous year, the majority of the students from this year's trip experienced their first time leaving their village on this field trip. Over fifty students from the village schools at Vega Redonda and Agua Buena attended a guided tour of the ancient Mayan ruins, learning about their own culture and history through this incredible hands-on experience.

CELEBRATION OF THE YOUTH

For the third year, Light of Esperanza has provided the youth from the villages it works with in rural Honduras with a day full of fun and celebration through its annual "Celebration of Youth" party. Light of Esperanza volunteers brought piñatas full of sweets, cake, and cola to the youth of the villages of Vega Redonda, Limon and Agua Buena. Volunteers also handed out toys to the youth. For most of the youth in these villages, this was their first time ever receiving a new gift. Their radiant smiles and happiness were evidence of the accomplishment of this program.

COOPERATIVE BUSINESSES

2013 celebrated the successful completion of Light of Esperanza's first cooperative project, the Women's Fish Cooperative. For the past three years, the five women from this Cooperative have been diligently working to raise tilapia fish, selling them to the neighboring villages. They followed Light of Esperanza's guidelines for economics success, reinvesting sufficient funds in their business so that it attained self-sufficiency and dividing the rest of the proceeds into personal use and a savings account. Accordingly, through Light of Esperanza's cooperative business "Plan for Success," the women had saved enough money at the end of their third year that they were able to separate from Light of Esperanza and form their own independent private enterprise. The five women purchased a pregnant pig and began a pig business. They now have economic independence, and are thriving in their new business project.

Light of Esperanza's second cooperative business, the Women's Chicken Egg Cooperative, did not have as much success in this past year, and was closed at the end of 2013. There were many different reasons for its lack of success, especially in comparison with the immense success that the Fish Cooperative project had. One of the main reasons this cooperative project was not as successful was due to the implied risks of entering into an agricultural business. By purely bad luck, many of the chickens got sick at the beginning of 2013 and died. This represented an extreme financial loss for the cooperative business. Other chickens were not as productive as had been expected. The five participants of this Cooperative business actively followed the advice of Light of Esperanza's volunteer experts in agricultural development on ways to care for the chicken and save the project. Unfortunately, the business continued to lose money over the year and a half of its existence and was unable to be resuscitated through plausible interventions. As a result, this Cooperative project was closed and disintegrated. Light of Esperanza learned a considerable amount from this experience. In part, it has caused our organization to move more in the direction of non-agricultural based businesses so as to avoid the dangers of working in an unpredictable economy. Additionally, Light of Esperanza has realized that it is important to factor into the budget proposal for each new project financial safeguards that will be available if needed to inject funds to protect the integrity of the project's survival.

In the first quarter of 2013, Light of Esperanza launched its third cooperative project, the Youth Corn Cooperative. This cooperative business was sponsored by a grant through the New York-based foundation, Jewish Helping Hands. Unlike the first two cooperative projects, Light of

Esperanza decided to focus on teenage youth as the participants instead of adults. The reasoning for this was that many of the teenagers in the villages of rural Honduras are likely destined to a future life of poverty as day laborers in the fields due to the lack of educational opportunities and the lack of employment options. Light of Esperanza selected five youth who had a reputation for hard work and had demonstrated their dedication to improving their lives and the lives of their families. In addition to working their other day jobs in the fields, the youth work on their cooperative business and shared the responsibilities of running their business. The Youth Corn Cooperative began its first planting in May of 2013. The five youth worked diligently to ensure that their crop would be successful and profitable. In October, the youth held their first harvest of the corn crop.

In their first harvest, the youth yielded thirty-four large bags of corn. Of these thirty-four bags, ten were sold, earning them a \$150 profit, all of which was reinvested in supplies for the second crop that is currently being planted. The rest of the bags were divided among the five youth. Interestingly, the youth decided to receive their individual earnings in corn for their family, rather than in cash. This speaks to both the extreme dedication of these youth to helping their families improve their living conditions, as well as to the reality of how extreme the level of poverty is in their lives.

All of the youth and their families are very excited about this project. Some of them seemed to have their doubts at first in regards to the possibility for success, but now have expressed the assurance that they are capable of making a positive financial difference in their lives. Additionally, the youth have demonstrated an impressive ability to complete very labor-intensive work, and are quickly learning the business side of the project through this experience. There is no doubt that they will be well prepared and knowledgeable in entrepreneurial and agricultural skills by the completion of this three-year project.

As with any project, there are always unpredictable occurrences that provide challenges to overcome and learn from. In the past year there were a few difficulties with the Corn Cooperative that were addressed and have given both the youth involved and Light of Esperanza a better understanding at how to ensure future success.

The first challenge came with a reality that often affects farm work and crop harvest – natural predators. After planting many of the initial seeds for the corn crop, the youth encountered birds and cows attacking their plants and eating them. This caused the project to lose some of its initial investment – especially because the seeds that were purchased were of a higher-grade quality and more expensive than the average corn seed. The five youth agreed to take turns guarding the crop in the first two months – alternating shifts beginning at 5am and ending at 6pm. While extremely difficult for the youth to do, they demonstrated an impressive dedication to their business, and were able to successfully keep the birds and other predators from attacking their crop.

The second challenge was another reality of the difficulty and insecurity of agricultural crops – the weather. This year in Honduras proved to be much colder than usual. As a result, the corn crop took longer to mature, and produced less than expected in its yield. While this has caused Light of Esperanza to consider moving more towards non-agricultural based cooperative projects in the future, the youth were still able to earn a considerable profit from the harvest.

The final challenge this year was that two of the five members decided to leave the cooperative group at the end of the first harvest. They did this primarily out of the need for immediate cash – something that the cooperative project could not provide them with. The youth decided to travel to the coastal town of La Cieba and the island of Roatan in search of work. Both of these towns are

focused on the tourist industry, and have the ability to help them earn the desperately needed income for their families. While there is immediate cash to be earned in La Ceiba and Roatan, both of these towns are very dangerous and have high levels of crime. Although the profits through the Cooperative project are more long-term, it is much more secure and stable for the youth to stay in Vega Redonda with their families. Upon the exit of the two youth from the Cooperative, there were two new youth that were immediately integrated into the group. While unfortunate that the other two youth left the Cooperative, the success of the project has not been put in jeopardy in any way. This challenge speaks to the difficulties in finding successful ways out of the cycle of poverty – those who take the risky path of quick money, and those who take the path of investing in their future and community with a slower and longer road to travel.

VOLUNTEERS

2013 saw a number of volunteers come to help support Light of Esperanza's work in rural Honduras. One volunteer spent six weeks living in Vega Redonda and working with Light of Esperanza's projects. He spent most of his time volunteering in the school teaching English and other topics, helping Light of Esperanza to build the computer center, working to renovate the village school, laboring alongside the youth in the Corn Cooperative project, and getting to know the members of the community.

In July and August of 2013, a number of other volunteers came to work with Light of Esperanza, teaching English at the school, organizing the school field trip to Copan Ruinas, and helping with the soccer tournaments and the annual "Celebration of Youth" parties.

REGISTERING LIGHT OF ESPERANZA AS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION IN HONDURAS

Light of Esperanza has been working on completing the goal of registering the organization as a non-profit organization in the country of Honduras. As a Honduran-based non-profit organization, this will allow Light of Esperanza to pursue a multitude of different funding opportunities, which thus will increase the effectiveness of operation and service. Light of Esperanza has acquired legal representation in Honduras and is in the process of completing the expected regulations of registering an organization as a non-profit entity in Honduras. It is expected that Light of Esperanza will complete its registration process in 2014.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR 2013:

In total, Light of Esperanza raised \$9,525 in revenue for the 2013 fiscal year.

Using money from its savings account in combination with money raised in 2013, Light of Esperanza's total expenses for the 2013 fiscal year were \$11,861.

Of the total expenses in 2013, **98% was spent on projects** (\$11,573).

The other 2% of Light of Esperanza's expenses in 2013 (\$288) was spent on postage, photocopies, office supplies, and promotional materials.

Additionally, Light of Esperanza received a contribution from the Directors of Light of Esperanza, Angela Madrid Lara and Shmuel Rubinstein, of \$16,164 in operational costs during the 2013 fiscal year.