

Artistic and Cultural Programming for Street Kids in Nicaragua

Nicaragua is geographically located in the heart of Central America, bordered by the countries of El Salvador to the North and Costa Rica to the South, and by the Pacific Ocean to the West and the Caribbean Sea to the East. Although it is a fairly small country, it boasts a large population of 5.1 million people, of which 53% is under the age of 18. **Nicaragua is the third poorest country in the Americas and faces major challenges of inequity and poverty, which affect children and women most severely.** The breakdown of income distribution shows that 45 per cent of all income goes to the richest 10 per cent of the population, while only 14 per cent goes to the poorest. While the country's per capita gross national product of \$453, its foreign debt is roughly \$6 billion and the repayment of this debt gravely affects 2.3 million Nicaraguans who live in poverty, 831,000 of whom live in extreme poverty, mainly in the Central and Atlantic regions of the country.

The prolonged economic crisis in Nicaragua has created an unprecedented level of poverty. **Eighty-three per cent of the economically active population is unemployed.** Coupled with high levels of poverty are low levels of education. In half of the poor families, the most educated family member has - at maximum - an elementary school education. This member is usually the man of the house, as the women of poor families do not typically receive a formal education.

One of every three children has some degree of chronic malnutrition and nine per cent suffer from severe malnutrition. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) of 150 per 100,000 live births is unacceptably high. In the Atlantic region and areas difficult to access, MMR may be twice as high as the national average. Adolescent pregnancies account for one of every four



births nationally. Safe water and sanitation coverage continues to be low, particularly in rural areas and those with dispersed populations.

Access to early childhood development interventions is extremely limited and **only 79 per cent of primary-school-age children are enrolled.** The quality and relevance of the Nicaraguan education system is in question. It takes an average of 10.3 years to complete the mandatory six years of schooling, and only 29 per cent of children complete primary schooling. Poverty affects school participation, with many families unable to afford the direct or hidden costs. Poverty also results in child labour, which affects more than 167,000 Nicaraguan children and adolescents.

One of every four households is headed by a woman. Family violence leads to family disintegration and a culture of violence. Today, 36 per cent of children are not legally registered due to administrative, legal and cultural causes. Only five per cent of disabled children receive appropriate support. Child and adolescent sexual exploitation, drug use and violence are emerging issues of concern. The existence of approximately 76,000 landmines continues to be a high-risk factor for children and adolescents.

The presence of HIV/AIDS in all departments and the potential of its spread represent a high, latent risk for the country's population. Official data show a low number of cases, giving a false sense of security. The main challenges of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and counterparts are to improve surveillance capacity; raise awareness among decision makers to overcome denial; and support the National Programme on Sexually Transmitted Infections/HIV/AIDS.



CHANGE FOR CHILDREN ASSOCIATION (CFCA) is an Edmonton-based charitable organization with a 30-year history of working for sustainable, grassroots community development in Latin America, Africa and the Philippines. Our development projects, their cost and priority, are determined by our Southern partners according to the needs of their communities. In Canada, our global education program engages the public in a process of awareness raising, analysis and action on issues of global justice.

Given the deplorable conditions that children in Nicaragua face, it is evident that there is a pressing need to create spaces for children to express themselves and interact with each other through discussion, the arts and recreational activities. Even in cases where it is intended to create these spaces, teachers, educators and parents tend to impose strict restrictions on what recreation and artistic expression should consist of, without leaving any room for imagination, creativity, fantasy, and the psychological processes experienced by children.

For the past several years the Nicaraguan organizations INPRHU, and FUNARTE have been working in their communities to create a truly authentic spaces for youth creativity and recreation. Providing this safe environment for children and youth to be themselves and act as children is very important, because this environment fosters self-respect, self-esteem, and self-worth, thus empowering the children and youth project participants to defend their rights, stay in school,



receive an education and become active citizens in the struggle for development and poverty alleviation. In essence, in order for people to attempt to better their lives in any way, they must first feel the empowerment to take responsibility for their success or failure of their lives, which is the primary goal of both organizations' programming.



One of the most pressing needs in the country today is education and awareness-raising on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Nicaraguan Code on Children and Adolescents. To address this need, this project supports a National Campaign on the Rights of the Child, using a variety of mediums to convey the message and educate youth about their rights, in order to ensure they defend their rights and take action against the violation of their rights. This campaign also engages the general public in the process, increasing their awareness about children's rights as well as other important issues, such as environmental protection and women's rights.



PLEASE SUPPORT THIS IMPORTANT PROJECT

Complete the form below and mail it with your donation to:

Change for Children Association:

2nd Floor, 10808-124 street, Edmonton, AB T5M 0H3 • Ph: 780.448.1505
 Fax: 780.448.1507 • cfca@changeforchildren.org • www.changeforchildren.org

Yes! I/We want to support Artistic & Cultural Programming for Street Kids in Nicaragua

Name: _____

Group/Organization: _____

Address: _____

City/Town: _____ Prov: _____ Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Amount \$ _____

Tax receipt required:
(donations of \$10 or more)

Yes or No

If yes, receipt in name of:

Individual or Group
as noted at left

Please make cheque payable
to Change for Children.