

# PROJECT GETTYSBURG LEÓN ANNUAL REPORT 2019



## Project Gettysburg León (PGL)



had a busy year in 2019, especially in the wake of the political crisis of 2018 that affected the country of Nicaragua both for the short-term and long-term. For much of the latter half of 2018, it was not possible for many projects to move forward or really for people to even be out and about on the streets. That slowly changed over 2019, a normalization within the country that in some ways remains controversial but was nonetheless noticeable for **PGL**. As a non-profit operating in Nicaragua that emphasizes cross-cultural exchange as well as development projects, 2019 was a difficult time since no delegations from Gettysburg were able to travel to Nicaragua and see our work first-hand. Hopefully there will be such opportunities in the future.

One change in 2019 was that Country Director Steve Lewis needed to return to Great Britain due to a family health issue, in no way related to the political turmoil of 2018. Greg

Bowles, who has had the position of in-country director for **PGL** in prior years, assumed the role again in 2019 and will continue doing this work throughout 2020. Program Coordinator Francisco Díaz continued in that role for **PGL** throughout 2019, and in 2020 will be named Assistant Director. Orlando Sarria, who has volunteered and worked with **PGL** for almost thirty years, continues in his role as Program Assistant.

**PGL** supports several programs in-country, the most long-term one currently being the arts school of Taller Artístico Xuchialt. This school was founded in 2006 by a group of young artists, with support from **PGL** and the sister city program of Project Minnesota León. All of its teachers are volunteers, and the school has always used its most committed students as the next generation of teachers. In Nicaragua, traditional arts such as music or folkloric dance are not offered in public schools. Xuchialt teaches these classes, as well

as classes in drawing, painting and the traditional sawdust carpets that are unique to the city of León. More than eighty students from the neighborhood of Sutiaba participated in classes in 2019, which is where both the school and the **PGL** office is located. Xuchialt also offered outreach classes to two rural schools outside of León, a school for low-income children in a very poor neighborhood of the city, and at an orphanage also within the city of León.

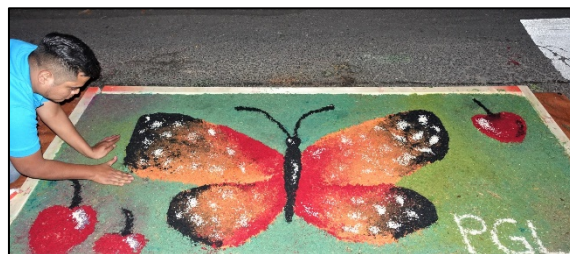




Although in 2019, no delegations came from the U.S. to Nicaragua as in prior years, a small group of artists from Xuchialt did visit the U.S. in the Fall of 2019. This group included Francisco Diaz, who is now the Assistant Director for PGL, as well as William Caceres, one of the founders of Xuchialt who had been to Gettysburg several times before. The group also included Laleska Hernandez and Alaniz Bojorque. The Xuchialt delegation gave

presentations at local schools, churches and at Gettysburg College, mounted an art show at Waldo's in downtown Gettysburg and participated in the annual Salsa On The Square event, where they were able to create a sawdust carpet and perform the dance of the gigantona. The group also took several classes themselves on topics such as watercolor painting and jewelry making, and visited local artists to get new ideas for the classes they teach in León.

In total, PGL paid a little more than **\$6,000** for support of Xuchialt in Nicaragua, not including the support for the delegation from Nicaragua to Gettysburg. These funds were for rent of the school facility, scholarships for low-income students, supplies for some classes and outreach to other communities.



PGL also continues its support for Las Tías, a local non-profit in León that works with impoverished children by way of after-hours tutoring for younger children still in school, and vocational training for adolescents in sewing, carpentry and hairdressing. Participants in their program also receive one nutritious meal per day, which for many of these kids is the only

decent meal they get. PGL's support is both for the school's social worker who visits the families of participants, as well as for arts and dance classes. Las Tías programs also include psychological counseling, with a particular emphasis on providing help to children in situations of abuse.



PGL's support to Las Tías in 2019 was for the amount of **\$3,000**.



**Project Gettysburg León (PGL)** in 2019 also initiated a school gardens project that will expand in 2020. This project was the idea of several young women taking classes in agriculture at university in León. Their proposal was to set up a large-scale garden at the school for children with disabilities in the Sutiaba barrio of León, very close by to the **PGL** office. The intent was to provide a more balanced and nutritious diet for the children, but this is also a thesis project for some of the college students.



Over twenty garden beds were established using the biointensive growing method, and planted with vegetables such as carrots, onions, cucumber, tomatoes, etc. **PGL** provided tools, seed and fertilizer for the project, as well as a small travel stipend to cover bus expenses for the five women and one man participating. Later in the year, **PGL** also assisted with support for the group to attend workshops and trainings in small-scale agriculture held in rural areas of Nicaragua, which included other topics such as solar ovens, composting, natural pesticides and beekeeping.



**PGL** spent **\$1,600** for this project in 2019, which will continue at the current school but expand to two other locations in 2020.



**PGL** also began exploring the potential for new projects in 2020 and beyond, with an initial focus on the community of Carlos Canales, which is named for a teenager murdered by the Somoza military in 1978. This community is a ten-minute drive from the city of León in the direction of the nearby Pacific Coast, but feels as if it is in the deep countryside. Over half of the community lives in extreme poverty and the housing is mostly tin shacks or homes made with walls of plastic tarp. Despite their circumstances, people in Carlos Canales are not despairing and are willing to

organize to make their lives better. **PGL** is looking at several potential ways to begin a relationship with this community and offer assistance. One of the most central needs is a potable water project, and we have done some initial work towards that possibility through community meetings and a needs analysis study. There are currently fourteen hand-pump wells in the community, only half of which are functional. The next steps would be to conduct a full engineering study.



**PGL** faced many difficulties with what was planned as its major project for 2019, the potable water project in the rural community of Talolinga. None of the delays or frustrations have had anything to do with the willingness of the community to work on this project. The need for clean drinking water is crucial to this community, but bureaucratic hurdles have been constant. **PGL** did move forward with engineering studies and some preliminary work on this project, and with a generous matching grant from the Gaguine Foundation in Juneau, Alaska, we should have the funds on hand to implement the water project. Our hope had been to begin and perhaps even complete this project in 2019, but the work will be done in 2020. The people of Talolinga are more than ready to do their part.



**PGL** spent **\$4,300** in 2019 on expenses related to the drinking water project in Talolinga and the potential project in the community of Carlos Canales.

After the political crisis of 2018 in Nicaragua, then-Country Director Steve Lewis initiated a program to support at-risk youth who could not attend classes. This program continued in 2019 with support of five programs, all focused on tutoring and home visits to keep kids in school. One of these programs even has a children's park. All five of these programs work with some of the most impoverished children in León and the surrounding area. Over 300 children have benefited from this program, at a cost to **PGL** of **\$7,200** in 2019.



For project-related expenses, **Project Gettysburg León** spent the following in 2019...

Taller Artístico Xuchialt – \$6,000

Las Tías – \$3,000

School Gardens – \$1,600

Potable Water Projects – \$4,300

After-School Programs - \$7,200

**Total - \$22,100**

*Most funds raised for the Talolinga Water Project were held in reserve and will be spent in 2020.*