



Introductory Newsletter

Co-partners of Campesinas

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Co-partners of Campesinas is a US based, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that supports *La Nueva Esperanza (New Hope)* and other associations working for women's and youth education and empowerment in developing countries in Latin America. *New Hope* is an organization of sixty rural girls and women from four impoverished communities near Ilobasco, El Salvador, who meet weekly to learn income-producing skills and advance the education of members and their children. Co-partners also supports the *Asociación para el Desarrollo Indígena de El K'iche (ADIK)* and the *Asociación de Desarrollo Comunitario (ASDECO)*, indigenous organizations located outside of Chichicastenango, Guatemala with goals similar to those of *New Hope*.

The Story of Co-partners

Co-partners began nineteen years ago in Ilobasco, El Salvador when a group of Salvadoran and expatriate women began Saturday morning classes with rural women from cantons surrounding the market town of Ilobasco. Classes emphasized keeping children in school, learning skills for health and income-generation, and assuming leadership roles in their communities, leading to the Co-partners' motto, "**Learn, earn, lead**".

As the National Reconstruction period ended, the expatriate volunteers left El Salvador. Two of them, a former Peace Corps volunteer from Peru and a USAID mission director's wife formed a 501(c)(3), upon their return to the US, with the goal of continuing to support the Ilobasco group and starting other similar groups. Four years later a program was started in Chichicastenango, Guatemala and more recently two additional groups were formed in El Salvador by local members of the Ilobasco group.

How We Work

In El Salvador, Co-partners works by providing **small grants** to partner organizations--groups of women who run dressmaking classes in **locations they identify and borrow** from churches or municipalities. The **partner organizations elect a board** to manage the classes and Co-partners **volunteers visit them annually** for evaluation and planning and to provide leadership training.



Program planning for the year to come

This year the Ilobasco partner organization is offering three year-long classes: dressmaking/tailoring, basic computer skills and hairdressing/cosmetology. Piñata and flower making, natural medicines, and cooking for special occasions are examples of shorter courses that may be given in addition to the year-long ones. Partner organizations pick the courses they think will give them earning opportunities.

New groups are formed by offering low-cost dressmaking/tailoring classes, but with a long term goal that **these groups will coalesce, seek legal status, and form organizations with missions broader than dressmaking classes**.

In Guatemala the program has developed differently. Co-partners allied with an existing indigenous organization through which we provide **school scholarships, leadership training, and intensive English classes for teachers and others**, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. English classes are provided because Chichicastenango is a tourist town and youth seeking a job with a salary need to speak it at a level far beyond what is offered in the school system.

Although Co-partners began with an emphasis on women and girls, mothers insisted that their sons were just as impoverished as their daughters and asked that they be included in all programs. This guidance led us to put an increased emphasis on programming for all youth.



Role playing in youth leadership training

Co-partners is led by a board located in Alexandria, VA. Members are primarily retired professionals with time and interest in international volunteering. Volunteers pay their own expenses on trips. Most recently, in August in El Salvador five volunteers conducted training in advocacy, crafts development, and peer education, as well as providing an enrichment program for elementary age children. The previous year workshops were taught in non-violent communication, community evaluation, and using theater for social action, in addition to a children's enrichment program.

Results

Over 850 women and girls have learned dressmaking or tailoring; over 100 youth have learned computer skills; others have learned traditional crafts or natural medicine. Over fifty percent report earnings from their new skills. Over 2,000 children have received scholarships. Women have formed successful businesses using the skills they learned to produce school uniforms. Women who were children in the early years of the organization are beginning to move into leadership roles.

Loss of Location and Building Campaign

Two years ago the Ilobasco group learned that they would likely lose their location. After an exhaustive search of other potential sites, the board and volunteers concluded that the best way for the group to continue and to ensure its sustainability would be to build a home of their own. Despite Co-partners initial commitment to using borrowed quarters, the board decided to support this decision and to help with fundraising. Land has been purchased, a two-story building with a large open room on the first floor and two smaller rooms on the second floor has been designed and construction begun. Funds are sufficient to build the first floor, but our hope is to build the two floors simultaneously. To do this we need to raise an additional \$15,000.



Maestro de obra (general contractor), Zeledón Duran, La Nueva Esperanza president, Orbelina Sánchez, and Co-partners' Coordinator, Archer Heinzen break ground on August 5, 2013.

Sustainability Plan

The design of the proposed center allows it to be used as a training center, a computer lab, an event space, and a sewing workshop. Volunteers are working with the board on how they can run an event space that will provide on-going income to the organization. Members are about to start a cooking class and are surveying local organizations to understand their needs for event space. Production of school uniforms will be a major focus of the sewing workshop.

How We Raise Funds

Like many organizations we concentrate fundraising in November and December, sending out a solicitation to past and potential contributors and conducting craft and alternative gift sales. We seek and transport to Central America in-kind donations such as laptops, sewing machines and yard goods. We apply for grants, such as are available to small organizations like ours. We are now a recognized charity with the CFC (Combined Federal Campaign) and conduct fundraising campaigns using such platforms as Razoo (www.razoo.com). We are registered with Jatna (www.jatna.com) through which you can order online from such businesses as Amazon, Walmart, Staples, Target, Travelocity, Zappos and iTunes and direct a percentage of your purchase to Co-partners.

What You Can Expect if You Become a Co-partner

Each year we send out **one solicitation and two newsletters** reporting accomplishments (This year because of the building campaign we are breaking our pattern and making two appeals!)

If you're interested we invite you to support us by joining us on a short-term volunteer trip. At a minimum we go to El Salvador twice a year (August and November) and to Guatemala once (November). Whatever your talent, we'd like to hear about it and figure out how it might fit into our program!

Co-partners of Campesinas, Board of Directors

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