

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



Friends of Batahola (English) / Centro Cultural Batahola Norte (Spanish)



friends_of_batahola



www.friendsofbatahola.org



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Message from the Co-Presidents

Saludos y abrazos (greetings and big hugs) from your new FOB co-presidents, Joe Connelly and Tony Perazzo.

We are honored and overjoyed to begin this chapter of service with the Friends of Batahola Board. We are grateful for the opportunity to share our talents, passions, and deep admiration for the transformative work of the CCBN.

For both of us, the greatest gift of this role is the opportunity to accompany the extraordinary staff of the Center, along with the children, adolescents, young adults, adults, and seniors who walk through it's gates each day. Our lives have been profoundly shaped by

time spent in Nicaragua, by witnessing the Center's impact in the wider community, and by the deep friendships we have found within this board and the broader Friends of Batahola family.

In a world too often marked by division, the CCBN remains a place of welcome, hope, and empowerment. It continues to nourish our spirits and inspire us to live out Sister Margarita's enduring reminder: each day is a new dawn, filled with possibility — and as long as the sun rises, there is always reason for hope and joy.

Joe Connelly and Tony Perazzo

Strengthening Capacities, Creating Opportunities

In 2026, the Center is launching two new projects designed to empower youth and women by expanding their pathways to employment, entrepreneurship, and personal growth.



The "Discovering my Skills, Visualizing Opportunities" Initiative serves 30 high school graduates (ages 18-25) from low-income backgrounds. The goal is to support their entry into the labor market through an extensive training process that includes soft skills,

digital literacy, personal finance, resume writing, and job searching. This project is funded by Davidson College Presbyterian Church.

Sponsored by a Friends of Batahola fundraising campaign, the "Learn and Launch: One Step Closer to Economic Autonomy" initiative focuses on providing 20 women entrepreneurs with tools to increase their household income and financial independence.

The project is continuation of the 2024 "Learn and Launch: Creative Women Implementing Economic Initiatives" project in which 22 women started small businesses. Through this experience, Center staff learned that beyond technical training, participants need mentorship to build their confidence and improve decision-making skills and strategic management of their businesses.

Beyond the economic results, both initiatives seek to foster profound changes in the lives of participants. By equipping participants with the autonomy to manage their incomes and life projects, the Center is contributing to development at the individual, family, and community levels.



Stitch by Stitch: Building a Path Filled with Hope

This year, the Bellarmine Chapel Scholarship Program awarded 2 full-tuition scholarships to Karen Giovanna Martínez Pérez and Marilén Adriana Guevara Pérez for the Center's sewing program.

At age 49, Karen, has reinvented herself and found a way to support her family through sewing. After a 12-year career as a bank teller followed by a period of unemployment, Karen felt a calling to develop a new craft. Inspired by a sewing machine her mother left behind as an inheritance, Karen enrolled in the Women's Apparel Design course in 2022.

Currently, she works in a modest home-based studio that she dreams of one day converting into a professional workshop she plans to name "Custom-Made Clothing."

"This support allows me to focus on my studies without financial pressure and reinvest those savings in my business venture."

Marilén's journey has been defined not just by family struggles but by a determination to build a better future for herself and her son, Brandon. The Center has provided more than just technical skills — it has offered

a sanctuary for personal and emotional growth.

Access to a full scholarship has been fundamental to her success. Besides covering fees, the scholarship includes a small supply kit with fabric, paper for patterns, and tools that Marilén used to make and sell several dresses last December.

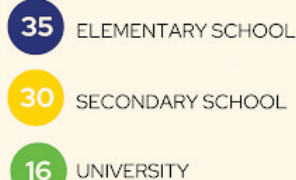
"When I received the supply kit, I was moved to tears. I had no idea the support would be so comprehensive."

In the future, Marilén dreams of launching her own business called "Marilén's Styles and Sewing." She is deeply grateful to those who make the Center's life-changing work possible.

"It's beautiful to see people supporting these initiatives. I hope they'll continue to support more families, because there are so many people who still need these opportunities."



EDUCATION PROGRAM SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



IN TOTAL:



ENROLLMENT PROCESS IN 2026

TECHNICAL, TRAINING AND VOCATIONAL PROGRAM



IN TOTAL:



Friends of Batahola Board's Recent Visit to Nicaragua



Friend of Batahola: Roberta Veleta



I became aware of Centro Cultural Batahola Norte many years ago when my dear friend Sue Keefe, shared about her connection to the center's co-founder, Sr. Margie and their hope to build the Center.

Since then I have and continue to volunteer in various ways. Our

parish, Immaculate Heart of Mary Church, supports the Center through garage sales, arts and crafts sales, and the annual luncheon. I was the treasurer for the Friends of Batahola from about 2010 to 2013.

Both our sons have visited the Center, and we have enjoyed hosting visitors from the Center several times. I have fond memories of Gerardo, the Center's art teacher, and our son AJ speaking Spanish at the dinner table. I didn't know what they were talking about but I loved watching how much they

were enjoying the conversations. The Center's director Sonia and her daughter Virginia have stayed at our home too. I enjoy sharing my time and skills and I love building these relationships.

I volunteer for the Friends of Batahola because I believe in the power to change lives through education and community support. Being a part of an organization that celebrates local heritage while supporting academic growth allows me to volunteer in a meaningful way.