



SUMMER 2026 NEWSLETTER

RIGHT TO ART & CULTURE



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



friends_of_batahola



www.friendsofbatahola.org



P.O. Box 36159, Cincinnati, OH 45236-0159

Message from the Co-Presidents

Saludos y abrazos (greetings and big hugs) as we enjoy summertime and all the carefree days this season brings.

Several years ago, the Friends of Batahola decided to move to a “co-presidency” leadership model. One of the major reasons for this was the realization that everyone brings different gifts to the table — some of us speak Spanish fluently and some can say “hola,” but not much more. Some of us spent our careers running around the halls of a hospital taking care of patients, while others were running meetings and completing spreadsheets. Some of us easily understand investment statements, and others’ eyes roll back in their head when we look at numbers on a page.

We’ve learned that when we all bring our best selves to the group, everyone wins. FOB wins because we get a diverse set of skills that meet many different needs. CCBN wins because we can continue to grow to assist them financially and accompany their leadership. And each of us individually wins because we get to see each other’s skills in action and learn from one another.

Read in this issue about how collaborations in Managua have led to great outcomes. As always, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your support and love for the children and adults of CCBN.

Joe Connelly and Tony Perazzo

Art as a Bridge for Inclusion



On September 3rd, 2025, a community mural was inaugurated at the Cristiano Isaias School, created in collaboration with the Center. Rooted in inclusivity, this project has created a space where creativity is the common language.

The initiative was driven by the search for alternative learning and socialization spaces for the school’s student body, composed of hearing, deaf or hearing impaired, and neurodivergent students. The school’s director, Ruth Aracely Gaitán, emphasizes that art has become a key tool within the school’s educational model: “Students were able to demonstrate their skills, and show that they could do it. They took center stage. That’s exactly what I try to promote, every chance I get.”

The Center’s Arts & Culture coordinator, Mora García, says that any uncertainties about working with students with neurodivergent and deaf students quickly disappeared. In their first meeting, a mask-making workshop with Center teacher Gerardo Arias, the team learned that art made communication easy and helped to overcome any

barriers. The project soon evolved to more complex tasks, like the mural.

The school’s director highlights that it was a profoundly significant experience for her students, who felt recognized and valued. The mural not only serves to beautify the space, but also signifies the educational community’s unity.

Esther Nohemí Leyva Caparro, a hearing impaired student, shares “I was nervous about not being able to do things well enough at first, but with practice, I started to improve. Art is wonderful because each person gets their own space to explore and create.”

This partnership yielded profound lessons about the importance of listening to students, adapting educational spaces, and the valuing of diversity as a source of strength.

“What struck me most was seeing the faces of the students — especially deaf students — because they show their emotions in their eyes. Watching them experience the finished mural was a tremendous gift — I felt as though they were receiving an Oscar,” recalls teacher Gerardo Arias.

The Garden of Emotions: a Book Born from the Writing and Courage of Girls and Young Women



Over the course of three years, a group of young girls and young women found a safe space to talk about their dreams, fears, losses, and ways of seeing the world through writing. Through this process, the Garden of Emotions was born, a collective publishing project that became a transformative experience for its authors, their families, and the team that supported them.

The workshops didn't just deal with literary techniques like microfiction and poetry, but also included deep conversations about what it means to be a girl, their hopes, and their fears. The process was guided by facilitator Dorling Lopez, who helped participants to discover the value of their own voice.

"I began to communicate my feelings more effectively and let go of emotions I had been carrying inside. The workshop came at a time when I wasn't feeling good and wasn't very social, but being surrounded by my peers made me feel like I could be myself," says Emily Murillo (18), one of the authors of "The Garden of Emotions."

Over the three years, there were 25 participants. Ultimately, 14 decided to publish their texts. It wasn't an easy decision. Many of the stories include sensitive themes like difficult family situations, grief, intense emotions, and intimate experiences. Sharing them publicly took real courage.

"The literary genres were perfect entry point to open up memories, open hearts, and hold space for our childhoods accompanied by responsible, caring guidance. The same themes kept surfacing: grief, joy, childhood memories, letters to childhood dolls, remembering who they were as little girls, and leaving room to imagine their dreams," shares López.

Publishing a book brought a steep learning curve for the Arts and Culture team — editorial review, layout and design, printing, communications, logistics. But the greatest achievement was watching participants learn to name what they feel and think, without fear.

"We accompany them so things can come together in the best way possible, because we believe in the capacity of young people — and we know that an empowered girl is a girl who will change the world," says Mora García, Coordinator of Arts and Culture.

Now that the project has come to a close for this group of authors, it will open its doors to a new cohort of participants to continue sprouting stories, emotions, and words that, just like a garden, will continue to grow.

Friend of Batahola: Jim Vorwald

My dear friend Sue Keefe introduced me to the Immaculate Heart of Mary twinning community in 2004 when we were on Pastoral Council together. I travelled to Nicaragua with my children, Katie and Christopher, in 2005, and returned in 2008 with my son Brian.

My favorite memory of Center is the overwhelming feeling of love which emanates from every corner of this spiritual oasis. I can still visualize the smiles on the students and teachers' faces. The people at the Center continue to be an inspiration to me. Our friendship is a constant, incredible and overwhelming blessing.

My most extensive role has been as a founding member of Project Education. During my first visit to the Center, the Holy Spirit inspired me, Mary Pommert, Melissa Auvil, Bob Sanker to develop a scholarship program whereby donors could provide financial support to mitigate or eliminate the costs of attending classes, which were a barrier to many.

We have now completed our 21st year of Project Education. Through generous donations, we have surpassed \$1M in donations and helped over 4200 students and teachers. Learning how Project Education impacts people's lives

has been gratifying. It gives us a greater understanding of how the Body of Christ knows no borders and transcends cultural and socio-economic differences.

Outside of my volunteer work for the Friends, I spent most of my 43-year career in Technical Support and Operations. I retired in January 2024 from an IT Consulting firm. I enjoy spending time with family (especially grandchildren), traveling, other volunteer work, golf, and photography.

