

# Friends of Batahola



## Center Responds to Long Drought in Nicaragua with Keyhole Garden

The drought is palpable in Nicaragua. The land is dry and cracked, there is little refuge from the sun, and all but the most stubborn plants have decided to vacation in their root systems. As a result, food prices have gone up, and vegetables are disappearing from meals.



Staff Accountant Gleris Ruiz Loredó breaks ground on the keyhole garden.

The Center decided to take a stand against the drought, which started in 2014, by creating a keyhole garden in its north corner. Keyhole gardens originated in Africa. They are drought-resistant and can be constructed from items found in the immediate vicinity.

Two volunteers from Canada are supervising the endeavor. They

*(Continued on page 2)*

## Message from the President



Dear Friends,

In February, I traveled with board members to Batahola to reconnect with the Center's staff and students. Being at the Center *energizes* me. It does such positive, good, uplifting work. One evening we were treated to student performances by the New Dawn Dance Group, the Ángel Torrellas Choir and the Margarita Navarro Youth Orchestra. One impressive young woman, Ana Sánchez Narváez, performed a violin solo.

Before her solo, Ana spoke to the audience. She said she found her purpose at the Center through music, playing the violin. She said she's achieved what she has because of the support of her teachers, Friends of Batahola, and the Center's scholarship program. And then, she made a big announcement: She had been selected to continue her music studies at the University of Costa Rica. Such joy for her! And, for me? Well, I was energized yet again by witnessing how the Center impacts the lives of students.

You can read more about Ana on page 3. Her story is one of many stories of students whose lives have been turned around by the many programs the Center offers. These programs are supported by your generosity, our donors. It's not always possible to see directly the benefit of your donation, but I hope Ana's story gives you a glimpse at the opportunities the Center provides...and the successes that are achieved. Your generosity makes a difference, and I thank you for your support.

Blessings,  
Mark Overley

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## Mission Statement

*Friends of Batahola supports, sustains, and promotes the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte in Managua, Nicaragua, through prayer, financial assistance, solidarity, and building community, thereby responding to the call of the Gospel.*

## Center Responds to Long Drought in Nicaragua with Keyhole Garden (continued)

initiated an awareness campaign about keyhole gardens and explained why home gardening is important. Then they encouraged staff and students to bring in materials from their homes to help build the garden: rocks, sticks, dirt, cardboard, ashes, iron scraps, dry bones, whatever was readily available.

A few days later, the work began. Stone by stone, stick by stick, the volunteers, staff, and students lent their hands to create their own vegetable keyhole garden. Even the youngest students participated by adding their artistic flare. Art professor Gerardo Arias had students paint flower vases made out of recycled materials to hang on the garden fence.

"I feel excited, happy, and involved," said staff accountant Gleris Ruiz Loredo who participated in the groundbreaking. "We have a new activity here at the Center!"



Art students paint vases to decorate the garden fence.

### Friend of Batahola: Jennifer Murtoff

*"Music has brought so much joy to my life. I want to pay it forward."*



Jennifer Murtoff's life passion is music. "Music is something I have to do. Part of my soul can't speak unless I'm playing music or singing," she said. Jennifer is an amateur classical musician. Her instrument is the French horn. Her college studies in Costa Rica led her on side trips to Guatemala and

Nicaragua...and eventually to the Center.

Arriving in Nicaragua, Jennifer was stunned by the level of poverty. She was assigned to the Center as part of a service-learning opportunity and was housed with two single mothers and their three children who were connected with the Center. There were two beds, she said, and the women gave her one, while all five of them slept in the other. Rodents danced on rails above their heads during the night. "The abject poverty, well, it opened my eyes a lot," she said.

Jennifer used her time to give music lessons to two of the students, while helping out with other projects. "I was just so overwhelmed by the beauty of the Center,

the beauty of the New Dawn mural, and what was happening there. It really is an oasis."

Since completing her education, Jennifer has been making a year-end donation to the Center for its music program. She made this past year's donation in honor of a mentor of hers who "helped and encouraged me to be a musician, which has brought so much joy to my life."

Music, Jennifer said, gives the students at the Center something beautiful, some ray of hope, some bright and cheerful place to go to in their hearts and minds.

*Read more online: [An Inclusive Ensemble](#)*



Jennifer's 2015 donation was used to purchase strings, resin, bows, violin cases, and other accessories for the music program. Claudia Mercado is the Center's Arts and Culture Promoter.

## READ MORE Online

[friendsofbatahola.org/newsletter/spring-2016](http://friendsofbatahola.org/newsletter/spring-2016)

- **Capes for Cancer Patients.** Art instructor Gerardo Arias and his wife, Maria Eugenia, carry on the Center's long tradition of serving others, making 57 superhero capes for children undergoing cancer treatment in Managua. A Friend of Batahola donates the fabric.
- **An Inclusive Ensemble.** The Center's music program is inspirational, educational, and inclusive for all who hear the call to play.
- **Student Reflections.** Read U.S. students' and chaperones' comments after a recent visit to the Center: "While poverty, distance, and injustice divide us, love unites us."
- **7 Ways You Can Help the Center...**and how signing up on Amazon Smile also contributes to our efforts.



**33rd Anniversary.** The Center celebrates 33 years of educating, serving, and empowering the poor. Read more and see photos online.

## It's Off to College for Scholarship Student Ana Sánchez Narváez



Ana has been coming to the Center since she was 10 years old, immersing herself in music studies which she says has "made me a better person, a woman who's capable of understanding herself and others, and it is all thanks to the values that I could have learned only in this place, the Center, the place I call home."

Ana, a scholarship student, has taken music classes and individual violin classes, and she has performed with the Center's choral and orchestral groups. For her service hours, she teaches violin classes to younger students at the Center.

Now, through another scholarship received from the Center, Ana is headed to the University of Costa Rica and its prestigious School of Musical Arts.

She wants the Friends of Batahola, both in the U.S. and Spain, to know how grateful she is for their "tireless care and faith in the youth at the Center who are blessed to be studying to reach our dreams."

We wish Ana much success as she pursues her studies.

## You Can Help Give Hope

If you'd like to contribute to the work of the Center, make a donation today in the enclosed reply envelope. Together, we're rebuilding students' lives. Donate to this hope!

*Friends of Batahola is a registered 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. 97% of all donations go directly to the work of the Center.*

How does the CCBN Give you Hope?



Giving the gift of Education

Darling, a 21 year old university scholarship student, is given hope by the CCBN through the learning and formation she receives in the scholarship Program activities, and the concern of the center employees for the success of the students

## Donate Now

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## 33 Students Sign Up for English Classes, Paving the Way for a Brighter Future

Thirty-three new students signed up for English classes which began in February. The classes, taught by Friends of Batahola volunteers, Natasha Hansen and Clare Morrison, are becoming quite popular. This year's students include a 12-year-old, as well as a security guard at the U.S. Embassy in Managua. Learning to speak English opens doors to better opportunities and higher-paying jobs for students.



*Students taking English classes are introduced to the Center's library. It's a tremendous resource for our English students, and all the other students, at the Center.*