

Message from the Co-Presidents

It seems so fitting on the 38th anniversary of the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte that we are highlighting education in this edition of the newsletter. When Sr. Margie Navarro, co-founder of the Center, first asked the women of Batahola what they needed, their main concern was to bring their families out of poverty. The first classes offered were cooking and sewing, skills the women could use in their own homes and as a way to generate income. As the Center grew, more classes were added. The curriculum has continued to grow and evolve to meet the needs of today's students. But the strategy remains the same: a commitment to education which leads to self-confidence and empowerment as the pathway out of poverty.

Even during these exceedingly difficult times, the Center has remained open, serving as an oasis of hope

to the people of Nicaragua. Because of their commitment to education, the Center has 38 years of student success stories, many of which we have highlighted over the years in our newsletters. With your help, the Center can continue its original mission of serving the people of Nicaragua, bringing about a New Dawn.

Peace,
Sue Keefe and Pat Berning



Raquel Donaire Hernández: A Young Woman in a World Full of Inequalities

In Nicaragua, young women face many barriers to getting a college degree. Raquel has encountered these barriers first-hand, but the Center has opened new doors she never thought were possible.

Rachel's mother passed away when she was seven years old; her father is a mechanic and her older sister is a seamstress. For her, it has been really hard to enroll in college. Due to economic factors her family had to prioritize household expenses.

The grieving process with the physical absence of her mother has been difficult to bear, but when she participated in the Center's workshops, it was a total relief.



"Before, my life had no meaning, but here [at the Center] I have found a reason to go on"

Raquel is currently a scholarship student sponsored by Immaculate Heart of Mary's Project Education. She said applying for a scholarship was the best decision she could have made.



"After studying Cosmetology and Hairstyling at the Center, I decided to take Computer Operations because I didn't know how to use a computer. Now, I am taking the Cashier course and I am always learning."

Raquel feels proud knowing how to use a computer. When she was a senior in high school, completing her thesis was complicated and she felt frustrated during the process, but now, she is surprised how easy it is to use this software.

"Having access to technical and vocational courses and being a scholarship student is a great opportunity that I will never forget," affirms Raquel.

Education Program

The Center recognizes Education as one of the fundamental rights for people to develop skills and fulfill their potential. Getting an education is a privilege that not everyone can afford. The Nicaraguan Foundation for Economic & Social Development estimates that the poverty rate in Nicaragua has increased to approximately 31.9% of the population in 2020. This means that over 2 million people are living on less than \$1.76 a day.¹



“Education allows people to have a better quality of life. The access to knowledge has the power to transform lives.”

—Juan Alfonso Caballero,
Introduction to Cooking student



The Center offers courses in a safe environment at affordable prices. They also have a scholarship program which supports low-income families to ensure everyone in the community has access to educational opportunities. Many families who apply for scholarships face the difficulties of domestic violence, unemployment, informal work and incomplete studies. The Center offers a holistic education based on human rights which invites the entire family to participate.



“For me, the key to education is to ensure quality teaching so that students can feel confident.”

—David Gutiérrez, Choir Director and
Introduction to Music Instructor

Even amidst the challenges that the pandemic has presented, the Center has once again opened enrollment for 20 courses in technical and vocational training, artistic development and adult basic education. The Center's current COVID-19 protocol limits enrollment to fifteen students per class.



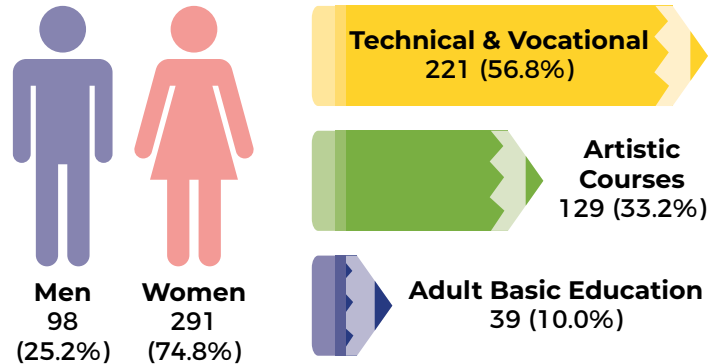
As the Center launched a social media campaign to register students, courses quickly filled their capacity. A total of 389 students enrolled and began classes in February, with the vast majority of students being women and girls.



“I think we all have the right to study to be someone better in life.”

—Gema Barrios, mother of a
scholarship student

Student Enrollment



¹<https://funides.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/201013.-FUNIDES.-Proyecciones-socioecon%C3%B3micas-2020.-Revision-a-octubre.pdf>

Friend of Batahola: Andi Newton

I first found out about the Friends of Batahola when they contacted my previous employer at a public accounting firm in Cincinnati looking for a treasurer. The organization caught my attention since my grandma is from Nicaragua. Once I met Pat Berning and Sue Keefe it was hard to say no, so I became the Treasurer on the Board of Directors in 2012. From the start I felt called to learn more about the Center and help support the work they are doing. My grandma came to Cincinnati for

college at Mount. St. Joseph where she met my grandpa at a dance with Xavier. Despite the language barrier they grew close and the rest was history. I enjoy serving on the board as a way to stay connected to my Nicaraguan heritage and also occasionally practice my Spanish. Most importantly I cherish the friendships I have forged with board members over the years, in fact many of them came to my wedding. My only regret is never being able to visit the Center, but I'm thankful for the technology that

has helped us stay connected. Whenever I see a video from the Center I'm astounded by the way staff speak with such eloquence and passion about the work they are doing. It really helps me become reenergized and remember the reason I'm doing this work.

