
BACKGROUND

Healthy Kids! Preschool Lunch Program

Where: Managua, Nicaragua (District V)

Who supports it: Pueblito Canada, Inc. (in partnership with Casa Canadiense)

Why we do it: Pueblito has developed the **Healthy Kids! Preschool Lunch Program** to meet the nutritional needs of preschool-aged children who live in poor, urban neighbourhoods on the southwest side of Managua (Nicaragua's capital city). Currently the Program operates in the area of Managua known as District V. District V is made up of hundreds of neighbourhoods (or "barrios") and is home to over 200,000 people.

Nicaragua – country context

A recent study by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education demonstrates the need for nutrition programs for young children in Nicaragua. The study found that 27% of all students in public school in Nicaragua suffer from chronic malnutrition and that 25% of Nicaraguan preschool students suffer from anemia (low red blood cells caused by iron deficiency).

Given that anemia is a condition that in the early years can affect a child's mental development, it is very important that attention be given to the nutritional status of young children in Nicaragua. Furthermore, the rising cost of living in Nicaragua associated with the current global food crisis and the rising price of oil is further jeopardizing the health and well-being of Nicaraguan children.

The Preschool Lunch Program provides community preschools with funds for food staples for the 10-month school year (February – November). Food is prepared in the preschool's kitchen by parents who volunteer their time on a rotating schedule. The preschoolers receive food every day of the week during the school year through three complete lunches and two nutritious snacks per week.

To participate, the community preschool must operate in a community-owned building that is equipped with basic kitchen facilities. It must have an active parent's committee willing to support the project. Beyond the funds for food, the preschools can request funds for basic start up costs in order to obtain such things as storage bins, a gas stove or plates, cups and cutlery.

A preschool needs approximately \$500 a month to feed 75 children three lunches and two snacks per week.

Pueblito Canada plans to extend the scope of this Program to more fully address food security issues for the families of these neighbourhoods. Furthermore, the number of participating preschools is expected to grow, as knowledge of the Program extends through the communities.

Participating preschools

The participating preschools are what are known as “community preschools”. Community preschools are the predominant form of preschool education in Nicaragua in both rural and urban areas. These preschools are run by volunteers (most often women) and overseen by parent committees (predominantly mothers). They are housed in local community halls. The Nicaraguan Ministry of Education provides some supervision and training but absolutely no financial support, whether for salaries, materials or infrastructure. While publicly funded primary schools in Nicaragua do have Ministry-supported nutrition programs, community preschools are on their own in this respect as well.

The program began in October 2007 with the **Arco Iris #1** (Rainbow) preschool in the *Carlos Nunes Sur* neighbourhood. In February 2008, two more community preschools joined the program: the **Las Palmitas** (Little Palms) preschool in the *Che Guevara* neighbourhood & the **Esmeralda Palacios** preschool in *Augusto Cesar Sandino* neighbourhood. The **Rayito del Sol** community preschool in the *German Pomares* neighbourhood joined the program in 2009.

350 children, aged 3 to 5, are currently benefitting from this program.

Strategic partnerships

In order to facilitate communication with the participating community preschools and ensure the success of the Program, **Pueblito Canada** has partnered with the **Casa Canadiense** in Managua, Nicaragua. Casa Canadiense provides the preschools with the banking services that they cannot access (as non-registered, community-run organizations) and supports the preschool teachers and parents committees with planning, evaluation and reporting.