



Helping kids find joy and success

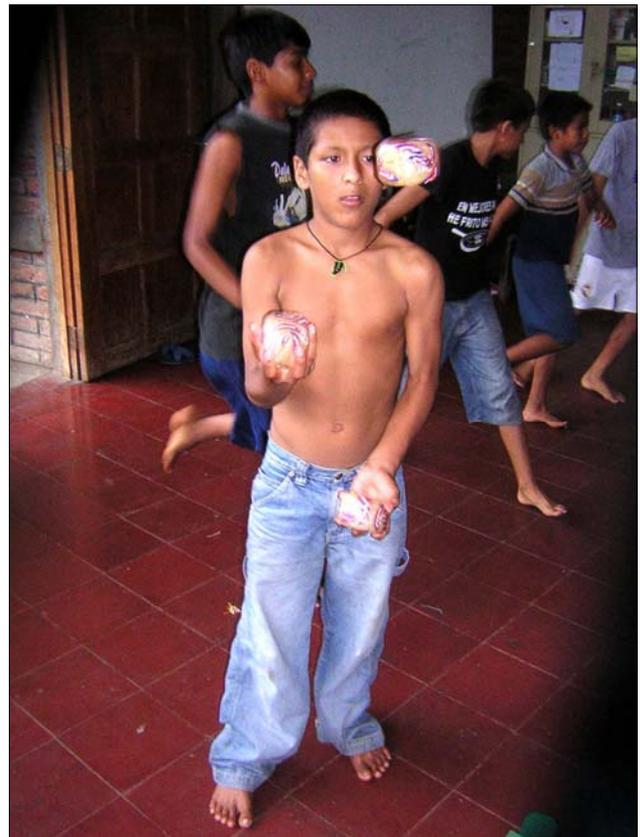
Clowns Without Borders—*Payasos Sin Fronteras*—is about bringing joy to places where it is most needed, such as refugee camps, conflict zones, and communities beset by poverty and substance abuse. In Nicaragua this program helps the boys of *Sí a la Vida* express themselves and gain confidence while having fun—an experience that is often rare for kids who have been homeless, hungry, and abused or rejected by their parents.

Clowns Without Borders is an example of how *Sí a la Vida* partners with available resources. Each week *Sí a la Vida* boys participate in two clowning sessions of two or three hours each, learning circus activities such as tumbling, juggling and walking on stilts.

While it's a fun and entertaining atmosphere, the boys also learn important behaviors.

“I saw an improvement in my time attending *Payasos* with the children,” says Andrea Krupsky, a *Sí a la Vida* volunteer from New England. “They gained confidence in themselves as they mastered new activities. They also began to listen more attentively to the ‘professors’ and--although they were not perfect all the time--they started to behave better during the activities as well.”

While having fun, the boys learn discipline, exercise new ways of expressing their feelings, and grow in confidence as they succeed.



Javier juggling three bars of soap!

The story of Michael Sanchez

Though this story is astonishing, it is not unlike the history of many boys at *Si a la Vida*.

Michael Enrique Sanchez Bleer was born in Managua in 1987. His mother soon had several children by multiple fathers and was a heavy drinker. After she smothered the sixth baby while passed out, Michael's abusive stepfather removed the children. Michael lived with his stepgrandmother until her death and then with an aunt until his stepfather forced him to join the family in a squatter settlement. Both parents beat the children often.



Michael Enriaue Sanchez Bleer

One day his mother left Michael at the home of a friend, saying she would be back later -- 13 years passed before he saw her again. His mother also left his siblings with friends and relatives, then went to live with prostitutes and work in a bar. Eventually Michael's stepfather found Michael's mother and moved her and some of the children to the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua.

Michael was now living on the streets. Befriended by a Miskita Indian family who were evangelicals, he got involved in their religion and for a time didn't leave the house for fear of the devil. He eventually returned to the streets, used drugs, led a gang, and was sad when -- after the gang was arrested -- everyone but him had a mother who came to get them. Michael dreamed of finding his mother again.

He came to *Si a la Vida* in 2000 and moved to the project's center on Ometepe Island in 2001. Now 14, he started school in the third grade despite never attending school before (he learned to read and write by himself).



Jonathan, and Michael with his mom and stepfather.

In 2001 Michael and *Si a la Vida* social worker Juanita Gutierrez traveled to the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua in search of his family. Not finding them, he came back feeling hopeless. He committed two robberies, was banned from *Si a la Vida*, and went back on the streets. When Michael learned of another project for homeless kids, he went there.

But that project closed in 2002, so Jonathan Roise and *Si a la Vida* helped Michael enter the Catholic orphanage on Ometepe. Michael finished second and third grades. After a dispute, he left the orphanage in 2004 and Jonathan helped him find a family to live with in Altagracia.

In 2005, when his adopted family insisted that he work rather than go to school, Michael returned to



*Sí a la Vida social worker
Juanita Gutierrez*

Sí a la Vida on Ometepe to be a *promotor* (educational assistant) and to go to school. He did not successfully finish his first year in secondary school, so in February 2006 he was reassigned to the project's *casa* in Managua to be a *promotor* there and to study carpentry and continue middle school.

In April Jonathan accompanied Michael as he once again traveled to Nicaragua's Atlantic coast in search of his family. And there on Corn Island Michael found his mother, stepfather, sisters and brother. Michael's story is far from finished. For now, he continues working with *Sí a la Vida* and studying carpentry, but he is considering whether to move to the coast to live with his family. ✨

Deybi Isaias Espinales Palacios

Meet one of the boys of *Sí a la Vida* through this bio-sketch

Deybi is from the small port town of San Carlos at the southern end of Lake Nicaragua. He ran away from home at the age of 11 because of chronic maltreatment by his stepmother and his brutish, overly domineering father, who is a *curandero* (healer or witchdoctor).

Deybi entered Casa Nuevo Amanecer (the *Sí a la Vida* house in Managua) in July 2004 and transferred to our Ometepe center in December of the same year. During his first several months in residence he was emotionally strung out — constantly sad and frequently in tears. Now he is quite stable and eager to get on with his life.

Deybi won the award as Best Student in *Sí a la Vida* for the 2005 school year and he hopes to become an educator for *Sí a la Vida* or a lawyer when he grows up. ✨



De ybi



*Deybi & friends with Volunteer
Tom Mueller*



*Deybi at the
swimming-hole*



Deybi with his family

Ortega wins Nicaraguan election

Daniel Ortega of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (*FSLN*) won election on Nov. 5 as Nicaragua's next president. Ortega led the revolutionary government of the 1980s and incurred the wrath of the U.S. government under Ronald Reagan, resulting in Nicaragua becoming a battleground in the Cold War.

Although it is widely expected that the U.S. government will drastically curtail aid to Nicaragua, which is the hemisphere's second poorest country after Haiti, it is unlikely that *Sí a la Vida* will be affected. With the exception of a Peace Corps volunteer assigned to the project, neither the U.S. nor the Nicaraguan government provide any support for the project. *Sí a la Vida* maintains a firm policy of political neutrality to avoid being affected as political winds change.

Unlike other Central American countries, Nicaragua did not have a significant number of kids living in the streets until after the Sandinistas were voted out in 1990. This may be due to the strong support the Sandinistas provided the poor in health, education and nutrition, which helped families stay together. It remains to be seen whether the policies of the new government will reverse the current trend of growing numbers of street kids.

Ortega won with 38% of the vote against his nearest rival, Eduardo Montealegre of the upstart Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (*ALN*). Other leading candidates were from the Reform Sandinista Movement (dissident Sandinistas – artists, poets and moderate progressives of the old government) and the *Partido Liberal Constitucionalista* (followers of jailed former president Arnoldo Alemán). ☼

The Internet comes to *Sí a la Vida*

After years of dreams and delays, the Internet arrived in *Casa Jose María* in July and the boys are enthralled. Not surprisingly, within a day one of the boys figured out how to type in *mujeres desnudas* and got his desired result. But now, several months later and with better parental controls and more experience, the boys have settled in to using the Internet regularly to complete school assignments, monitor local earthquakes and volcanoes, access information on their favorite *reggaetón* stars, and just surf around.

Several now have e-mail accounts, and four have set their sights on computer engineering as future careers. The computer skills they learn in *Si a la Vida* provide them an important advantage for future employment in a highly competitive job market.

The Internet service is provided free to *Si a la Vida* by *Red Libre de Ometepe*, a project initiated by several people on Bainbridge, Ometepe's sister island in Washington state. Essential to using the Internet, several replacement computers for the kids' lab were donated in May by the Collier County School District in Florida.

Many thanks to David and Peter, Kari, Wally and Carol, Dr. Clukey, Tom, Pau y los catalanes, Ty and everybody else who helped make this dream a reality. ☼

-- Articles in this newsletter provided by Jonathan Roise and Andrea Krupsky

--Photos provided by Rick Allstetter, Kari Lagerloef, Tom Mueller and Jonathan Roise

Speeding up education for older kids

With a strong push from *Si a la Vida*, the local grade school in Altagracia instituted accelerated primary education for older kids this year – and it is a resounding success for the *chavalos* of the project as well as for poor kids from the community.

The *Extra Edad* Program allows older kids to complete primary school in three years instead of six. This is a great aid to our ex-street kids, who on average are five grades behind their age level in school. Now they have the opportunity to make up for lost years and prepare themselves for further education and/or technical careers.

A year ago Luz Mary Gutiérrez and Maritza Mercado – two *Si a la Vida* staff members who are also teachers – went door-to-door to sign up

participants. The Ministry of Education required 60 students to initiate the program. The response from the community was enthusiastic, and the school year began in February with 90 *Extra Edad* students, including nine from *Si a la Vida*. As a result, this year the local school will have its biggest graduating class ever – more than 100 students.

Concerns about attrition proved unfounded except on the first and second level, and enrollment in the third level (fifth and sixth grades) increased 20% as the year progressed. A major factor in successful retention of the students was support from the Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association, which approved a grant to provide uniforms, backpacks, school supplies and graduation expenses for the neediest students. ✨



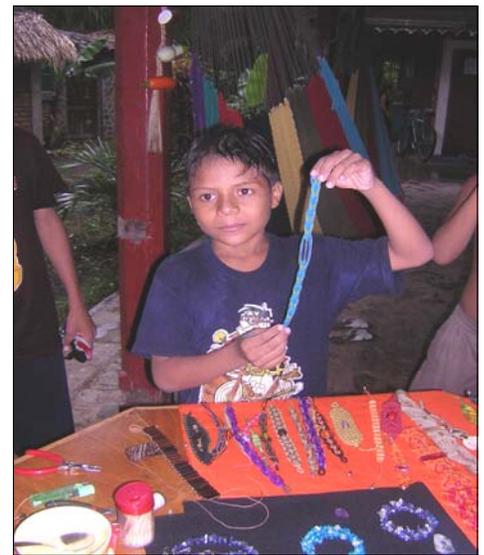
Three sixth grade graduates from *Si a la Vida*.
Left to right, Michael, Nelson, Franklin

News briefs

- Mariano Lorío, who assumed the coordination of *Casa José María* in September a year ago, was diagnosed with a brain tumor six weeks later. He was operated on in November 2005, followed by radiation therapy, and remains in serious condition. Meanwhile Jonathan Roise has reassumed coordination of the Ometepe house.
- Construction of a second center for an additional 15 kids on the Ometepe site received a boost in October when volunteer Rick Allstetter sharpened up rusty architectural skills and helped finalize the design for the new house.
- *Sí a la Vida* presented several workshops for the combined staff of both centers, with an emphasis on therapeutics and refining skills as educators. Supporters from Spain helped finance the sessions.
- Boys at the Ometepe house are eagerly learning English and trying it out on every visitor (including those from Spain and Germany!), thanks to the very dedicated efforts of volunteer Patricia Hayes.
- Local dancer Abraham Barrios is teaching Nicaraguan folkloric dancing to the kids on the Island. Four of the smaller kids gave their first public performance in March.
- Not to be outdone, six of the older kids have organized a *reggaetón* dance group (somewhat akin to break dancing) and have given several public performances.
- Production of friendship bracelets and other *artesanía* continues stronger than ever at both houses. This past year the kids have expanded into making earrings and necklaces from beads, seeds and other natural materials. They all say *Thanks* (in English!) for supporting them with your purchases. ☺



Sí a la Vida Folkloric Dancers



Manuel showing off handicrafts

About *Sí a la Vida*

Sí a la Vida was founded in 1994 to rescue kids living on the streets of Managua. Many are runaways from very poor and troubled homes. Many are addicted to sniffing glue, which banishes hunger pangs.

The project strives to rescue, rehabilitate and reintegrate kids into their communities. *Sí a la Vida* has two centers: At *Casa Nuevo Amanecer* in Managua, about 30 boys receive care each year, with about 12 in residence at any time. After they unlearn the habits of street life, the boys go to our center on Ometepe Island, *Casa José María*, where the focus is on public schooling.

Sí a la Vida also provides the basics for survival (shelter, food, clothes, health care),

teaches responsibility, and offers opportunities to earn money.

The kids range in age from 8 to 16. The average stay is about 2.5 years. Each of our two centers has about six staff members as well as long-term volunteers. Annual expenses for *Sí a la Vida* total about \$85,000.

Contacts for *Sí a la Vida*:

In the U.S.:

Bob and Millie Royce
513 Madrona Way NE
Bainbridge Island WA 98110
(206) 842-8517
bomiki@bainbridge.net

John Riess
2823 - 4th Avenue West
Seattle WA 98119
(206) 282-3858
johnriess@comcast.net

In Canada:

Ometepe-Gulf Islands Friendship Association, c/o Janice Finnemore
2681 Fulford-Ganges Road
Salt Spring Island, B.C. V8K 1Z3
twinoaks@saltspring.com

In Spain:

Asociación MOSAIC
Angel López Hanrath, Presidente
Corsega, 621, 4rt, 3a
08025 Barcelona SPAIN
Tel 93-284-37-98
associacio_mosaic@terra.es

In Nicaragua:

Jonathan Roise
Apartado OR-16
Sucursal Oscar Robelo
Managua 15, Nicaragua
From the U.S.: 011-505-289-0998 — Managua Center
552-8754 — Ometepe Center
jonathanroise@hotmail.com

<http://www.asalv.org>

Please be generous. We depend on your support.

Your donations make a huge difference in changing lives for the better —

- \$54 supports one boy for a week . . . \$550 pays for three staff members for a month
- \$100 buys two bicycles \$1000 buys uniforms and school books for a year

Yes, I'm proud to support *Sí a la Vida*!

My check is enclosed for \$_____, payable to "*Sí a la Vida*."

Charge my Visa or MasterCard for my donation of \$_____.

Credit card # _____ Exp date ____/____

My company will match donations. I've enclosed the forms.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone _____ e-mail _____

Please mail to: Partners for Health/*Sí a la Vida*, P.O. Box 30191, Seattle WA 98103-0191

Partners for Health
P.O. Box 30191
Seattle, WA 98103-0191

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
PERMIT NO. 863



News From the Nicaragua Street Kids Project

Fall 2006

Inside —

- **Helping former street kids find joy and success** — partnering with Clowns Without Borders
- **Los Chavalos (the kids)** — meet a couple of the boys of the *Sí a la Vida* project
- **The story of Michael Sanchez** — a remarkable history of one boy's journey in Nicaragua
- **Ortega wins Nicaraguan election** — an update on the political climate
- **The Internet comes to *Sí a la Vida*** — four kids already bent on becoming computer engineers
- **Speeding up education for older kids** — program enables moving faster through primary grades
- **About *Sí a la Vida*** — how a grass-roots project is giving many kids a brighter future