

Sí a la Vida makes an important shift from Residential Treatment to Prevention

August 2015

Dear Friends,

I have exciting news to report to you this summer. *Sí a la Vida* is changing its focus from **residential care and rehabilitation** of street kids in Nicaragua to **prevention** – working with kids who are still living with their families, but are slipping into lives of school truancy, drug abuse, petty crime, and, ultimately, failure. As always, *Sí a la Vida* will help kids to turn around their lives, but now in the context of family and neighborhood, helping them *and their families* to cope with stress of living in one of the poorest nations in the Americas.

This change is a response to current social conditions in Nicaragua, and it is consistent with new directives from the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Family stating that children should not be placed in residential care unless there are no other options. We have reported previously that there are no longer kids living around the markets of Managua, begging for food and sniffing glue. Most "street kids" actually live at home, at least at night. Many of the kids coming to *Sí a la Vida* in recent years have been brought in by their despairing parents who see them getting into trouble, avoiding school, and slipping into "the world of the streets." We've already been working with some of them as "day kids" who spend their out-of-school time at *Sí a la Vida*.

The model for our day program:

To work with these "day kids," we have been using the "Si, yo puedo!" model designed by Si a la Vida volunteers Nicole and Joel Espinoza. We will now use it as a basis for our overall program. Some key aspects include:

- Increasing school attendance, reducing drop-out rates, and providing academic support.
- Offering engaging activities after school to decrease the likelihood of involvement in negative social activities such as gang membership and drug use.
- Educating youth and families about non-violent conflict resolution.
- Improving family interactions by providing in-home counseling.
- Providing parenting classes and parenting support groups.

Sí a la Vida will include girls in the project for the first time!

We have previously referred girls to other programs because it was not feasible to include them in our residential program. Now we can help them. Having girls in our program will allow some important educational opportunities, including training and modeling for how young men and women can interact in positive, mutually respectful, and non-violent ways.

What happens to our center on Ometepe Island?

We will start working with "day kids" on Ometepe Island as well. Not surprisingly, we find that many kids on Ometepe have the same problems as the kids in Managua, including school truancy, vagrancy, and petty crime. We will move the Ometepe center from our banana plantation to the town of Altagracia to work with these kids and their families.

The plan for the Ometepe plantation is to boost its agricultural production, cultivating not only plantains but other cash crops, and even raising small livestock. The buildings may be used as a retreat center for the project or a tourist center for Ometepe Island. The goal is to produce more income from the property and thus greater self-sufficiency for *Sí a la Vida*. Two long-time supporters of *Sí a la Vida* from Australia, Martin Reilly and his wife Margaret Nixon, have been volunteering on Ometepe during this period of transition. They have also been attending *Sí a la Vida* Board meetings in Managua. Martin has been working hard to develop the agricultural potential of the plantation. Margaret has been doing staff training and working with the kids at the Ometepe center. We are enormously grateful to Martin and Margaret for their commitment and support during this crucial time.



Martin Reilly working with the kids on Ometepe Island

We very much need <u>your</u> support in making these vital changes. Please be as generous as you can so that *Sí a la Vida* can adapt and continue to meet critical needs in the years to come. Only with your support can the project continue to help kids move "from the world of the streets to a world of respect."

Please donate using the enclosed donation card or donate online at www.asalv.org.

If you have any questions about these changes, please write to me at my personal e-mail address: rick8x@yahoo.com. I will do my best to answer them.

Sincerely,

Rick Allstetter

President of Amigos de Sí a la Vida