

Global Giving Health Promoter Project



Three health promoters making a difference in their communities.

About Etta Projects:

Etta Projects is a development organization striving to alleviate poverty in the most rural villages of Eastern Bolivia. Founded in 2003, its mission is to partner with Bolivian communities to implement sustainable solutions to the challenges of poverty.

The core of all projects is training and education to empower participants with the tools to make sustainable changes in their lives. Solutions often focus on, but are never limited to, the areas of health, water, sanitation, hygiene, nutrition, leadership training, education, and income generation.

About the Health Promoter Program:

Health is extremely poor in Bolivia and conditions are most dire in rural areas. People in rural areas battle increased malnutrition, the lack of adequate sanitation, poor hygiene habits, an increased risk of teen pregnancy, and the inability to access health services. Despite the fact that people struggle daily with illnesses, villagers are often left to battle their health issues alone. One elderly woman says, "I have lived in this village for over 50 years and we have never had a health center. We're lucky if a doctor comes out once a month, and during the rainy months, when we need him most, he never comes at all." (Sra. Guadalupe, Age 67, Village 6 de Agosto)

Generally it is the women in rural villages who are responsible for responding to the implications of poor health. Their role in the community gives them a unique understanding of local health concerns, and yet their voice is almost always unheard during forums where villagers discuss community challenges and plan for a better future. The absence of women in community development directly impacts which community needs take priority and which get disregarded; consequently health issues often do not take precedence.

With no doctor in the community, villagers often have nowhere to turn when they are sick, injured, or malnourished. Few people outside their village can truly understand their everyday struggles, which creates a larger disconnect between real health needs and current health services. The absence of the community's voice, particularly the women's voice, in health planning translates into unstable, ineffective health systems.

Etta Projects trains community-elected local women to be health promoters. The project provides the participants with the necessary skills to tackle pressing health issues in their community. Workshop themes include: Women's Health, Children's Health, Nutrition, Hygiene & Sanitation, First Aid Care, Preventing Common Illnesses, Sexual Health, Public Health Care Policies, and Administration of First Aid Kits. In participating villages, a health post will be constructed and supplied where the health promoters can attend to their community members in a confidential and sanitary setting. Additionally, each village receives a medical kit. It's the health promoters' responsibility to manage the kits so that essential medicines and supplies are maintained in the community.

Health Promoters have the opportunity to showcase what they learned to their community by hosting diverse health promotion activities, including a community health fair. The health-related activities are an excellent opportunity to enhance the awareness of the role of the health promoters in each village and to teach families about important health issues, including how to make hydration solutions, test for breast cancer, and access different contraception options.

At the end of the training, the participants can take an official exam, which upon passing will recognize each health promoter as an official "Agente Comunitario de Salud" (health promoter). As an official health promoter, the participants are eligible for monthly stipends through government funding, essentially creating internal sustainability of the project. As recognized officials of the municipality, health promoters are also allowed to participate in private municipal meetings where funding priorities are established and local projects are designed.

Community health promoters are empowered to effectively respond to the health needs of their village. Health promoters continually promote and advocate for improved hygiene and sanitation, family planning and nutrition. At the same time, they also serve as the important link between the village and the health centers making certain that the sick, injured and pregnant receive adequate medical care. Additionally, medical supplies and services are more available in rural areas as health promoters administer first aid kits, facilitate health-related activities, volunteer at the local health center, and care for the sick and injured.

These increased skills, resources and access to community health information enhances women's involvement in the community. Women learn new communication skills that give them an important and continuous leadership role in the village and a voice in future community health care decisions.



Dr. Catherine teaching first aid to a health promoter