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Transforming  
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# ANNUAL REPORT 2013



[www.rayodesol.net](http://www.rayodesol.net)



TRANSFORMING  
children's lives  
through service and  
**LOVE**  
in Nicaragua



## Letter from the Board of Directors

Dear Friends,

Without question, 2013 was a year of many blessings for Rayo de Sol. Because of your generous and consistent support, we had a year of much growth and learning. Our work is modeled on the most essential of Christian values- love and compassion. When we begin from a position of love and act compassionately towards all other human beings, as Jesus did, our work is destined for success. That is how we are able to shine light on the children of Nicaragua.

The area where we have chosen to work in Matagalpa, Nicaragua is filled with families who want the same thing for their children that we all want. They want their children to grow in healthy communities, to have enough food to nourish their bodies, to get a decent quality education, to have access to decent jobs. We could summarize it simply- to have opportunities. That is why we have focused on creating these opportunities and the initial results have been amazingly successful.

In 2013, we provided health services, school nutrition, and quality education to nearly 600 children in Matagalpa. We are very aware that we cannot accomplish much on our own, so we have dedicated time and energy to developing a network of partner organizations, including both governmental and nonprofit organizations. These partnerships have allowed us to improve the quality of the services that we provide. Creating change in communities that have been submersed in the cycles of chronic poverty for generations happens slowly, but we are already starting to see the results.

We have been so blessed to have the support, guidance and encouragement of so many people. If you are reading this report, you are surely one of them. Your support is essential to shining light and love on children in Nicaragua, and we are grateful that you are part of the Rayo de Sol family.

We are excited about the possibilities that lie ahead in 2014 and beyond, and hope that you will continue on this journey of love and compassion with us.



## Mission statement, one paragraph about Rayo de Sol

Rayo de Sol is a nonprofit organization, based in Atlanta, Georgia. The organization was created by a group of concerned Christians, committed to putting their faith into action. Rayo de Sol is founded on Christian values and the belief that the Gospel is a call to action, a call to love and service. We believe that development is a collaborative process, requiring meaningful participation of beneficiaries and communities. Successful development programs are created by constructing partnerships among donors, volunteers, community members and local leaders.

### MISSION

Rayo de Sol is an organization committed to serving God and ministering to children in Nicaragua through sustainable, community development initiatives.

Rayo de Sol currently implements education, health and nutrition programs for approximately 600 children and adolescents, in several urban communities on the outskirts of the city of Matagalpa, in northern Nicaragua. Most of the students are enrolled at the 15 de septiembre school, a public school for preschool through sixth grade. Public services are limited in these communities and unemployment and underemployment rates affect nearly 70% of the population. As a result, the majority of the families live in cycles of chronic poverty. In response to these conditions, we have developed program strategies that will provide new opportunities for growth and development for children and their families.





## Early Education



Early education, from 0 to 6 years, is the most important stage of human development. Children need stimuli from their parents and other family members, in order to develop the cognitive and social skills necessary for their growth and development. In Matagalpa, very few families have the knowledge or resources necessary to stimulate their children's early development. Rayo de Sol implements activities to promote early education in the home, as well as strengthening public preschools, through teacher training, and provision of equipment and materials.

In 2013, our main focus in early education was on implementing and replicating the Montessori methodology. Most preschools in Nicaragua are community preschools, which means that teachers do not have

formal training. Typically, first grade students have difficulty with numbers, colors and letters because they don't have an adequate learning foundation in learning during preschool. Last year, we provided training and technical supervision for 5 preschool teachers, as well as providing learning materials for the 96 preschool students enrolled at the 15 de septiembre school.

During the year, both students and teachers demonstrated considerable progress. The five preschool teachers were able to implement many new teaching strategies, based on the Montessori model, which had a direct impact in student performance. Students in the preschool classes demonstrated improved learning in language, numbers, colors and social skills. The real impact of the Montessori training will be monitored as these children go through primary school. They will have a solid foundation on which to build their lives. In 2014, our goal is to equip eight classrooms with Montessori resources, and to provide training for eight preschool teachers.



## Primary Education



The majority of the children that we work with are in primary school (first through sixth grades). Although the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education has done an admirable job to improve the public education system in recent years, there is still much to be done to improve the quality of education. Most schools have overcrowded classrooms, insufficient infrastructure and very few teaching and learning resources. As a result, many children have low academic performance and teachers have difficulty engaging students with such limited resources. This eventually leads to increased dropout rates. In Nicaragua, nearly half of all students drop out before finishing the sixth grade.

We provide a number of services for primary teachers and students, focused on improving the quality of education. All of these activities are closely coordinated with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education. In 2013, we offered educational enrichment activities for all students at the 15 de septiembre school, which included tutoring, art classes, sports, Christian values, computers, and reading comprehension. Students participate in enrichment activities for three to four hours a day, to enhance their regular classes. Reading comprehension is one of the most important areas, as reading skills are essential for success in all academic disciplines. During the year, students showed steady progress in both their academic performance, as well as their personal development. The retention rate for all primary students was 91% and a total of 82% of the students passed all of their classes. Teachers also monitored progress in discipline, cooperation and other social skills.





We also held regular workshops for teachers, to help them to develop and implement new methodologies and classroom management strategies. Teacher training was focused on: Montessori methodology, mathematics and reading comprehension, communication skills, arts & crafts, and developing portfolios for all students, in order to monitor their classroom performance. In addition to the 17 teachers at the 15 de septiembre school, 16 teachers from three other schools in Matagalpa participated in training events as they were anxious to improve their teaching skills. Portfolios were also kept on teacher performance and notable improvements were documented in mathematics, reading and classroom management skills.





## Health and Nutrition



Public health conditions in the urban communities of Matagalpa are precarious, and few public health services are available. Because of the lack of basic infrastructure (roads, drainage, sewage, potable water) families in the area face many health risks. Children are the most affected and are highly susceptible to common illnesses such as respiratory infections, parasites, diarrhea, and skin problems. Because of the economic conditions, children often don't have adequate nutrition in the home. Malnutrition rates in the area affect nearly 40% of the children, which also makes them more vulnerable to getting sick.

In 2013, we provided public and primary health services to the 600 children at the 15 de septiembre school, their teachers and their parents. Educational workshops were held to address simple

ways to prevent common illnesses at school, in the home and in the community. Workshops addressed dental health, internal and external parasites, nutrition and respiratory infections. All children also received two medical checkups during the year to monitor their health conditions and chart their physical growth and development, in conjunction with the school nutrition initiative.

All children at the 15 de septiembre school also received a nutritious meal every day, in collaboration with the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education, which provides some dry goods for the school. We purchased fresh fruits, vegetables and dairy products to make meals more balanced and nourishing. Students and parents also created a school garden which provided lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers and squash for the lunch menu. At the end of the school year, our health monitoring system revealed that 80% of the children had a positive growth tendency during the year, increasing in both height and weight.





## Youth Club



Young people in Matagalpa face a serious lack of educational and economic opportunities. Most students lack the resources to continue their studies, and end up dropping out of high school after a year or two, if they make it that far. Many young people have to begin working in order to contribute to the family income. Teen pregnancy, alcoholism and violence are the symptoms of this deeply rooted problem. Young people need opportunities for education and employment that will help them to break the cycles of chronic poverty.

In 2013, we organized a youth club in the urban communities where we work in Matagalpa, to begin to provide young people with new opportunities. A total of 80 adolescents, from 12 to 20 years old, joined the club and participated in developmental activities throughout the

year. Most of the participants are formally enrolled in primary or secondary school, though several have had to abandon their studies for different reasons. Activities in 2013 centered on providing safe, recreational outlets for young people, while also focusing on their personal and spiritual development.

Activities held in 2013 included sports, art classes, educational movies, family values classes, environmental education, violence prevention and academic tutoring. The young people were so engaged by this pilot program that it will form the foundation of a high school scholarship initiative that will be launched in 2014.





## Special Projects



There are always multiple needs in all schools and communities in Nicaragua, and we try to respond as agilely as possible to make steady improvements. The two main projects that we developed in 2013 were the installation of an electrical system in the school and the creation of the Peggy Thome Memorial Library.

Although the 15 de septiembre school in Matagalpa was built in the 1980s, electricity had never been installed at the school. When the school was built, it was a rural area with no public services and a very small population. Since the Ministry of Education has limited resources for improving schools, the electrical system was never installed. Last year, we asked our donors to help us get electricity to the school and the response was overwhelming. In a few short weeks, we raised the \$1,800 needed to install the electrical system.

Each classroom now has two light fixtures and an outlet. In addition to improving lighting, which will facilitate teaching and learning, teachers will also be able to use audio-visual aids in the classroom. We also added additional outlets to one of the classrooms, where we hope to install a computer lab in the future. This will allow for more dynamic teaching methods and improved learning. This small project will impact the lives of 500 students and 15 teachers. Thanks for helping to make this dream a reality.





Peggy Thome was a dedicated supporter of Rayo de Sol and when she passed away in March 2013, we spoke with her family about the best way to honor her life and commitment. The answer was unanimous- reading. Peggy was an avid reader and loved to share books with friends and family, particularly books about animals. Working together with Peggy's family, we created the Peggy Thome Memorial Library Fund in October 2013, to honor her life and compassion by creating a small library at the school in Matagalpa.

Our goal was to raise \$5,000 by December 31st and because of your generous support, we raised a total of \$5,455! Donations were received from more than thirty individuals, including many new donors. Peggy's family was touched and inspired by the outpouring of love, to honor her life and her memory. With the funds, we converted an office space at the school into a small library. The walls have been painted in bright colors, shelving has been built and best of all- we have been able to purchase more than 300 new books!

The library will contain children's literature, adolescent literature and reference materials. High school and university students will be able to use the library for research and school projects, and teachers will also be able to use the reference books for class planning. During the 2014 school year, the new library will be a great help for strengthening the reading clubs, as well as promoting other reading comprehension activities. Reading is the foundation for learning. Peggy's commitment to providing opportunities for children in Nicaragua has been an inspiration to many people, and her legacy will be seen in their smiles. Her voice will be heard in their laughter.







## Partnerships

One thing is clear- we cannot (and should not) do this on our own. The process of social change requires coordination and cooperation. We have built a number of important partnerships that enable us to offer quality programs for children and families in Matagalpa. We are proud to introduce you to a few of our most important partners:



### Ministry of Education

One of our most important partners is the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education (**MINED**). We work in close coordination with MINED to ensure that our program activities are congruent with national and local education plans and goals.



### Tin Roof Foundation

With more than 20 years of experience working in Nicaragua, the **Tin Roof Foundation** has provided us with invaluable guidance, funding and friendship.



### Infancia sin Fronteras

We have been fortunate to work closely with the Spanish nonprofit, **Infancia sin Fronteras** (Childhood Without Borders). They have been generously permitting us to use their community center for computer classes, youth club meetings, parents meetings, sports and art classes.





### Fabretto Foundation



**Fabretto** has been an important partner for nearly five years now. **Fabretto** continues to support us with technical expertise and in kind donations, which contribute to maintaining high quality program services.



### National Reading Campaign

We joined **the National Reading Campaign** in 2013, a coalition of nearly 30 businesses and organizations working to promote reading for first graders. Through the campaign we have shared experiences and best practices with other organizations and also received donations of reading material for the 15 de septiembre school.



### Engineers Without Borders

Our newest partnership is developing with the Georgia Tech chapter of **Engineers Without Borders**. Their experience in improving community infrastructure and health conditions will be vital to implementing community development projects in 2014.



## Income and Expense Statement: 2013

INCOME	2013
Individual Contributions	\$23,000.00
Board Contributions	\$25,000.00
Fundraising events	\$5,000.00
Business & Church Contributions	\$4,500.00
Foundation Grants	\$18,064.00
<b>Total Operating Income: 2013 Programs</b>	<b>\$75,564.00</b>
Gifts in Kind: Equipment and Supplies	\$23,656.21
Gifts in Kind: Services	\$2,000.00
<b>Donations received for long term fund:</b>	<b>\$25,000.00</b>
<b>Restricted income received for 2014 programs</b>	<b>\$76,083.46</b>

Expenses	2013
Management Staff	\$18,347.10 28%
Program Staff	\$12,019.75 18%
Education Programming and Supplies	\$9,302.89 14%
Infrastructure Improvements	\$5,089.62 8%
Health and Medical Expenses	\$3,852.92 6%
School Nutrition	\$5,575.36 8%
Teacher Training and Cultural Events	\$5,087.01 8%
Administrative Expenses	\$2,699.28 4%
Advertising and Communication	\$1,968.34 3%
Equipment Purchases	\$1,720.10 3%
<b>Total Operating Expenses: 2013</b>	<b>\$65,662.37</b>
<b>Net Income 2013</b>	<b>\$9,901.63</b>

■ Management Staff

■ Program Staff

■ Education Programming  
and Supplies

■ Infrastructure  
Improvements

■ Health and Medical  
Expenses

■ School Nutrition

