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Sociology 493

### Real People, Real Help, Real Difference

People often talk about wanting to help people but don't know how. Around the holidays, people tend to look for charities to donate to but don't know "where their money is going to." Right here on the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point campus there is an international non-profit that SHOWS you, in real life, where your donations go to. Nicaragua is a very beautiful country, with lots of wild-life, culture, and a population of warm, loving, generous people. The Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners of America is a non-profit organization, with its international headquarters right in cozy Nelson Hall on the UWSP campus. At W/NP, there are many international programs that directly, and truly, have direct benefit on the people of Nicaragua, and they stem around the learning centers and the warehouse. The W/NP changes the lives of recipients, and volunteers.

One direct way to see the impact of W/NP is the warehouse. The warehouse is where donations are held, and once a month (every month!) an entire day is dedicated to packing up the donations warehouse into ginormous boxes to send in shipping containers to Nicaragua. Many things are needed, and many things are donated and sent. Beds have been donated, as well as mattresses, sewing supplies, clothes and toys, and even medical supplies have been sent down. Since 1995, over 3,000 sewing machines alone have been sent! Being able to help at an organization and know for sure that you are making a difference is a really incredible feeling. Being able to see pictures of, or even skype with, people who are receiving the donations is very

moving. Humanitarian efforts affect not only the people receiving the goods, but also those helping get those goods to the people. Being able to see a change in someone's life, or knowing you are making a difference in some way is very rewarding to the volunteers of W/NP.

Another way to see the impact of W/NP is the learning centers. The learning centers started out with two women making one center to teach women how to sew. This has now grown to over 100 learning centers all across the country of Nicaragua, and has expanded to sewing Chica Nica dresses, cooking, craft classes, beauty school, dressing for burn victims, and more. The impact of these learning centers is indescribable. The Chica Nica project is out of the learning centers. Women in Nicaragua sew doll dresses with sewing machines we send down in our shipping containers. These dresses come in many designs, including ethnic dresses, themed dresses, and dresses that remind us of a certain Nordic sister duo that has become popular with the current generation of young kids. By sewing these dresses, these ladies are able to sell the doll dresses to make money to support their families. We even sell them right in the W/NP headquarters in Nelson Hall. By providing sewing machines and sewing classes, these women are able to support their families and use their knowledge and skills.

What people don't talk about with volunteering are the life-long connections you make. Personally, working as W/NP's summer intern, I feel like I have a new perspective on life and item usage, and have made connections with people I will never forget. I met so many people over the summer, and was astounded by the amount of volunteers there are all over the state and country! There are people involved in so many ways and from so many places. It seems that everyone involved with the partnership has found their own little niche. There is a gentleman who repairs all of the sewing machines and approves them before we send them down. There is a woman who handles all the Chica Nica doll dress orders and the website. Some people are really

good at packing and organizing the warehouse, and others help us out by scoping out things we could have donated and sent to Nicaragua. The community also has become involved in ways I never realized before my internship. Sentry donated supplies like folders, bags, and binders when they switched their logo. The Green Bay Olive Garden donated 200 chairs for us to send to Nicaragua. The Rock-N-Roll Café in Stevens Point graciously hosted a fundraiser dinner, giving all proceeds to W/NP/ People of all backgrounds, lifestyles, and expertise all have a place with the partnership. Since starting this internship and meeting all these people, I have not only been warmed by the generosity of these people, but they have also taught me “waste not, want not.” They are so creative at finding ways for things to be used, they do not suffer from functional fixedness like I found out I was. To see the creativity on how things could be used in different ways is really interesting. Things don’t get thrown away in Nicaragua like they do in the United States. Every item has a purpose, and every item has a repurpose. There are two people in particular that I met this summer that were very good at finding ways to use items, and knowing exactly what Nicaraguans would want, use, and need. I even learned of ways to repurpose around the office!

Volunteering can change your life, and impact those you are serving. The Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners of America have a tremendous impact on those they help in Nicaragua. They help provide needed items to people, build learning centers, stoves, medical equipment, and sometimes a way for women to provide for their families. It also has an impact on its volunteers. Lifelong connections are made, and it changes your perspective to being more aware of re-purposing, being grateful, and conservation. W/NP is a strong international non-profit program, and YOU can help make a difference. W/NP relies on the graciousness of its volunteers. There would be no W/NP without the great people that want to make a difference in

other people's lives. Helping out is like a choose your own adventure; you can be as involved as you want. Donations of money, supplies, and equipment are always welcome and needed. One way to donate is to fill a backpack of school supplies to send a kid to school! If you want to spend more time, fundraisers are a great start. There is an annual event called "Swings for Nicaragua" in which a fun golf outing in the Appleton, WI area is a fundraiser. Another way to help is spreading the cause by word of mouth – people can't help an organization if they don't know it exists! Another fun and easy way to spread the word and be involved, besides speaking to people about W/NP or posting on social media, is the annual month long Bike/Hike event! For a donation of \$10, participants keep track of the miles they walk/hike/bike, to "go the distance between Wisconsin and Nicaragua," and get a cool, comfy t-shirt! Wearing the shirt can bring awareness to the organization, especially if you talk about it with people you meet and know. Another way to help is to go to Nicaragua and help first hand to build things, teach a class, or help in another way you think you could be strong at. Learning Center Treks are a great way to see the beauty of Nicaragua, and provide service to the people of the country.

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