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The Etta

Projects Story

Etta Projects is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization created to honor the life of Etta Turner.

Etta died November 25th, 2002, at the age of 16. She was a Rotary International exchange student in Montero Bolivia. She was traveling with friends on a bus when the driver fell asleep and drove off a cliff. Etta and six Bolivians died.

Several months after this amazing young girl's death, the priest of the Salesian Catholic Church in Montero, who was also Etta's principle, asked to name a nutrition center for impoverished children after Etta. As it became a reality, the sorrow of Etta's death and the joy of feeding many children combined to create the nutrition center called Comedor de Niño's Etta Turner. Etta Projects was a result of her family, friends and the Rotary Clubs here in the States desire to honor Etta. Etta Projects hopes to give ongoing support to this lovely center and if funding allows to help with similar projects, wherever they may be needed. Etta Projects is Etta's legacy: to give to the world in her death as she did in her life.

Etta I opened in June 2003 in La Floresta, one of the poorest neighborhoods in Montero, Bolivia, where Etta lived. We began by feeding 100 children per day but our mission has come to include helping their mothers acquire the skills to support their own families.

In July of 2005 Etta II opened its doors in Pampa de la Madre, a much more rural section of Montero. Here disease and poverty are even more acute and Etta II is one of the first humanitarian aid projects in this area. We now feed 200 children and service 120 mothers and families. Our local partners in these projects are the Salesians of Montero and the Rotary Club of Montero.

Etta Projects provides the funding for operating expenses, with our major donors being Rotary Clubs from the Puget Sound region in the state of Washington and in Michigan & Wisconsin, as well as friends and family of Etta.

OUT OF HUNGER....ON TO HOPE



August in Bolivia

by Penny Nixon-West

It is winter, 90* and humid most days and then the wind starts blowing in from Argentina. It feels good at first but soon turns cold and the temperatures drop to 50*-60*.

This lasts for 5 or 6 days and wouldn't be so bad if anyone had heat. Everyone's cold; not just the poor don't have heat, they just have more holes in their walls and are colder. We are all glad when the wind stops and the warmth returns.

Because I live with the employees, when in Bolivia, the work begins around 7:30 am and can go way into the night. All it takes is someone to get an idea or need to problem solve something and we are working till we drop. I have to say our staff is incredibly dedicated.

The Rotary Foundation grant that we received in April was being well used. Etta I & II each have 1 large community garden, with 5 individual gardens at Etta I, as well as the children's garden. The produce was already flowing, the families were eating better, and money was being made. One day 5 women waited until I was done very late in the afternoon. We hired a taxi and they each showed me their gardens. For the last few, it was completely dark and I had difficulty trying to see lettuce and radish plants. They each were incredibly proud!

At Etta II we had our one year celebration with the highlights being a dance the girls worked on for weeks in beautiful skirts made by the mothers sewing group. The boys threw a traditional dance together at the last minute and we had to rent their costumes but it all turned out great. The sewing women displayed their skill by doing a fashion show of school uniforms, dressy outfits and casual wear that they each had made. Again they were all so very very proud!!

Etta I graduated the first cosmetology class. The women were so meticulous about their work that we were over

11/2 hours late in starting. Families arrived to celebrate—we even bought a little champagne to toast them. Each had one or two models of hair styles, cuts and braids. These women who usually look like peasant women looked radiant. As they received their certificates, pride was the theme of the evening.

One woman even invited my staff and me to her little shack(two rooms-where she and her husband, their 3 children, a brother and his wife, her father and an aunt live) where she had prepared potatoes and fried chicken wings for us. It was delicious!!!

The sewing group, now named “ Women without Limits,” graduated in September and is working with MCC to get its first micro credit loan. This small group of 12 women is doing well. The name tells you how they feel. In August we started a new cosmetology class at Etta I and our first class at Etta II. The equipment from the Rotary Grant made them feel like queens and Etta Projects has the best salons in all of Montero.

Our literacy class began at Etta II and for the first time many women and men have the opportunity to learn to read and write in a safe, encouraging environment. I brought 200 books with the grant for our small libraries. When these were unpacked I can’t tell you the tears and oohs and screams that emerged from our before and after school teachers. The kids were so excited too to see such beautiful books, all for them. Well, our literacy class didn’t get a chance to see them before I left but the books will be shared with the adults and the kids.

The Rotary Foundation may have bought the equipment but it takes teachers, administrators, nutritionalist, gardeners, social workers, kitchen staff, maintenance, accountants, to make it all happen and for these expenses you are responsible. We need you to continue to give and We hope you are proud!

This fall brought changes in staff too. Tiffany Thomas and Christina Dasilva turned their positions over to two equally capable women, Jaclyn Kordell & Katie Chandler. I have learned to appreciate the talents and skills that each of our Projects Managers have brought to the job. These women are the ones keeping me up all hours of the night. They are tireless and brilliant. Without them our programs would not survive.

Having five of them in the house at once nearly did me in though. Katie Chandler wrote our next article. Katie is our new Project Manager at Etta I. Hopefully you will hear from Jaclyn in our next issue. Katie is from Chicago , she has her masters in Organizational Management with a focus on development from the School of International Training. Prior to this she worked for two years with World Teach in Ecuador. Katie is wonderfully crazy. We give her a very nice place to live in Montero and a few days of me arriving, Katie sits me down and tells me she wants to go live in the Pampa. This is the location of Etta II. It is also known as “The Knife”

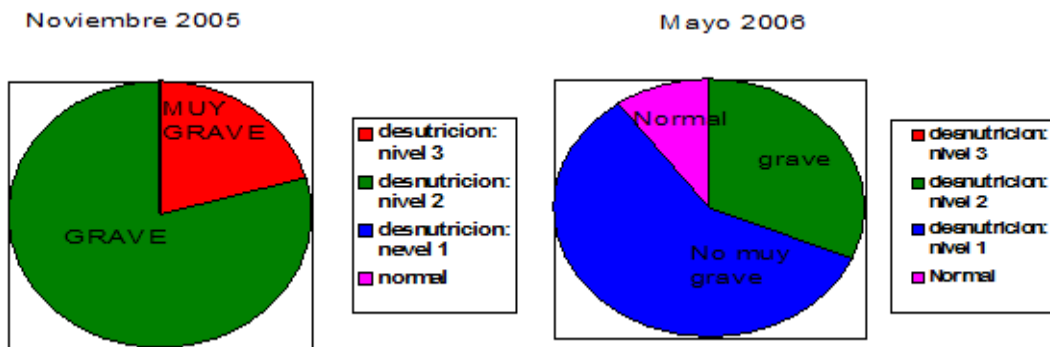
It is not the safest of neighborhoods to say the least and generally people do not go out after dark. Most homes are huts and most do not have electricity. Katie had even already found her home. It does have electricity and even a real bathroom. After weeks of going over this with Katie and coming up with her survival plan, she moves in. Her motive: to live among the people she will be working with; to live in their neighborhood and really get to know the families, the names of all the kids, their husbands, their sisters, their mothers. So this is where Katie lives, she conned the priest out of some paint and she has a cute little home in the middle of “The Knife”



What a Difference a Year Can Make!

When one enters the doors to Etta II, it is hard to believe that the organization is only one-year old. In the mornings the kitchen fills with cheerful music, a delicious aroma of nutritious food, and light-hearted chatter between the kitchen staff and the women participants who take turns contributing to the daily workload. By noon, over one hundred children come to receive a balanced meal and support from friends and staff. Many children come early or stay later to take part in the out-of-school program where they receive assistance in their schoolwork and the chance to play educational and recreational games. Throughout the day, mothers come and go while participating in workshops that bring new hope and opportunities to their families. In August of this year we celebrated the one-year anniversary of Etta II, which brought light to the impact and progress of the project.

One of the most important ways Etta II has reached the community is through the improvements of the children’s health. The children that initially entered the project had seriously poor health conditions. All were malnourished and the vast majority suffered from anemia. Etta Projects made certain that the children received well-balanced meals, routine doctor visits, and necessary medications. Within one-year, each and every child left serious malnourishment and some soared to normal health levels.



Note: We will always have the category “grave” because we will always be taking in new children.

Etta II has also put seven different women’s workshops into motion: sewing, cosmetology, gardening, soup making, bread making, literacy, and general nutrition. These workshops have changed the lives and attitudes of the participants. Members of the sewing workshop, for example, make clothes for their family; and the women from the garden workshop not only are able to bring food home, but have also increased their income by selling their produce in the market and to the comedor. Besides providing women with the opportunity to gain new skills and escape poverty, these workshops are also a safe place to find friendship and support. Ruth of the sewing workshop states, “From the beginning, I have always liked sewing. This [workshop] gives me the opportunity to learn what I like; and I have friends now here that share this experience with me.” Wendy from the cosmetology workshop adds, “It’s beautiful because we learn what we like. It helps ourselves and helps our family.”

Children’s capacities have simultaneously progressed in stride with those of their mothers. The kids’ dedication to the out-of-school programs has left both teachers and parents pleased with the results. In a recent questionnaire, 75% of parents reported improvements in their children’s grades; 74% of parents reported that their children talk about the activities of the out-of-school program at home; and 89% reported that their children complete their homework more frequently. In addition, over half of the children’s teachers indicated an improvement in the children’s grades.

We are proud of the strong impacts that Etta II has made in the community in its first year; however we recognize that the work has just begun. Each and every step forward creates both new needs and different opportunities. Today Etta II strides to not only implement new workshops, but also strengthen current ones.

We hope to fill the shelves of the out-of-school program with more books, games, musical instruments, and art supplies. We aim to expand our staff so that we are capable of reaching more families and impacting more lives. Etta II’s first year has proved to be successful; and it brings us excitement and anticipation to see what the future holds.....