

MAMA News

May - June 2012



A little girl waits her turn to receive medical attention from a visiting team of volunteers to her village in rural Honduras.

MAMA Project

Mujeres Amigas-Miles Apart
(Women Friends-Miles Apart)

Nutritional Rehabilitation
Medical & Dental Brigades
Work Teams
Preschools

Cross Cultural Training
Deworming & Vitamin A
Campaigns

Donating Medical & Dental
Equipment & Supplies
Community Development
Scholarships

Child Survival Training

MAMA News is a bimonthly
newsletter that provides
updates about MAMA Project,
Inc.'s programs and service
to communities in Honduras,
Haiti, and Nigeria.

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In this issue of "MAMA News", we will continue our reflections of the past 25 years of work in Child Survival. For the first two articles, please see our MAMA News Archive available for download at www.mamaproject.org/archive.html

Mission Teams

*Written by Priscilla Benner, MD
Director, MAMA Project, Inc.*

When we first dreamed about a partnership mission project between Mennonite women in Pennsylvania and Honduras, we envisioned much of what MAMA has grown to be. Starting in the early 80's, we talked of a program to impact Child Survival by teaching mothers, fighting malnutrition with a specially designed micronutrient enriched SuperBar, deworming, and providing better access to medical care by training volunteers in the villages to treat common illnesses. But Mission Teams? We never saw them coming....at first. Even by 1985, when MAMA was named "Mujeres Amigas (Women Friends) Miles Apart", and we were committed to the vision, we didn't see the hundreds of teams, and thousands of Hondurans and North Americans whose lives would be impacted by the chance to work together face to face and side by side in urban squatter villages and rural mountain villages.

We didn't imagine the profound impact that the experience of sharing each other's lives, and hearing



each other's stories would have on people who were able to open their hearts to each other and share the journey for a time.

Eunice Landis advocated for mission teams, and then spearheaded the first official team in 1987. It was made up mostly of Christopher Dock High School students. We worked in latrine construction, deworming and vitamin A distribution. MAMA has learned a great deal in the past 25 years, and our current brigades reflect the benefits of having figured out some good ways to accomplish our tasks more efficiently. But, even though we were learning, literally, on the road doing our work in the streets, making friends under the hot sun,

getting sick, and having tremendous logistical problems, we were motivated to continue the work by the magnitude of the challenges and the joy of being able to share with those in need. No matter what stages of development our work has been in, both Honduran and visiting participants have been profoundly affected.

Early teams (before cell phones and experienced Honduran staff were in place) endured more logistical tribulations. But still to this day even in the cities and more in the rural villages, conditions remain very challenging. Absent or undependable electricity, no plumbing, and bad roads haven't changed very much in many of the places that we work.

Our first four villages were located within the city limits of San Pedro Sula, Honduras, but the people received few of the benefits of city dwellers. The conditions were unforgettable, with open sewers, and regular predictable flooding during rainy season. Children were dying of diarrhea, without medical care, even though they lived within walking distance of the hospital. Then the city started bulldozing those slums, and moving the people into worse conditions, swampland, not fit for human habitation. Our teams visited and witnessed. They brought cement, medical care, nutrition work and deworming campaigns to the new communities, but, perhaps their greatest contribution was moral support.





Dr. Benner (in blue) talking with a visiting team about the Nutrition Center that was newly started.

Out of the experiences that we had as service teams, MAMA Project participants, both Honduran and North American, became vocal agents for changes on many levels. Wally Wolff advocated for affordable, safe building lots and was successful. One entire resettlement camp reaped the benefit, and people living in precarious conditions began to become small settled towns when they were finally able to get a secure title to their own plot of land. Who could have predicted that? We never saw it coming...

After the first few years, the original villages were improved, and malnutrition was under

better control, so we decided to expand our work out to rural areas. In the mid 90s we started planning a nutritional rehabilitation center, and teams started the construction in San Francisco de Yojoa. Line Lexington Mennonite Church sent the first group to work on the foundation. In 1997 we opened the Center, and started to bring families. Teams helped to locate malnourished children and helped with the center activities, participating in early childhood stimulation, in other words, playing with the children. That has remained a favorite activity of many team members.

The following year, 1998, Hurricane Mitch devastated Honduras. After the acute rescue and relief phases of the crisis, teams began to participate in reconstruction. Whole new villages on safer ground were built for victims of the Hurricane.

Shortly after the Nutrition Center got underway, the number of teams coming every year MAMA started to increase to the point that lodging team participants with families in San Francisco de Yojoa began to become more difficult. Therefore, the Mission House was constructed to house teams, and also to accommodate Honduran village health volunteers as they take their training courses when there are no teams coming.

Brigades now include medical and dental treatment, deworming, anemia testing, detecting growth stunting and wasting in children, reading glass dispensing, nutrition and health teaching, and micronutrient distribution. We have turned our lessons learned into a training course on Child Survival to facilitate the sharing of ideas as MAMA moves into new places.

Reflections from the McCarthy Family Experience in Honduras

The McCarthy Family (Al, Tammy, Caleb, Mary, Sarah, and Jonathan) served in Honduras in May 2011 with MAMA Project. Here is a portion of what they experienced during their time there. To read their full reflections, please visit www.mamaproject.org/archive.html



Sarah, Tammy, Caleb, Jonathan, Al, and Mary with a Honduran friend.

When Al and I (Tammy) first learned about the trip to Honduras, God gave us both a desire to join this mission team with our whole family. It was a daunting endeavor as there are six of us which would be costly for a family surviving on one income. But as homeschoolers, we knew this would be a perfect opportunity to give feet to our faith as well as a great

hands-on learning experience for our children.

We were amazed and humbled by the generosity of many friends and family members who supported our trip as well as the faithfulness of God to provide what we need to follow His calling. He raised over \$6000 for our family to be able to go on this trip!

Before we left on our trip, I came across a song by Josh Wilson called "I Refuse." This song verbalized the reason we were going on this mission trip. In the verse, he talks about the fact that it is easier to just move on when we see someone in need. But in the chorus he says:

I don't want to live like I don't care

I don't want to say another empty prayer

Oh, I refuse to sit around and wait for someone else

To do what God has called me to do myself

I could choose not to move

But I refuse

This is what our family was doing. We were not going to sit by while the least of these cried out for help. We were going to be the hands and feet of Jesus in Honduras.

In the beginning of our experience, I was overwhelmed with the living conditions of the people. I had never experienced this level of poverty. The trash all over. The unsanitary bathroom facilities. The mud-covered stick homes with tarps for walls to give some level of protection from the weather. Tin roofs that make those homes little ovens. The children with hard working hands. I was frustrated by my inability to speak the language and thus adequately communicate with them. It was hard to see beyond all this at first...

But God always works in our hearts if we let Him. I began to see the pride that the women had in their simple homes, even when they were barely shelters. I began to see the warmth in the smiles of the children who were so eager to see us. I enjoyed the shy giggles while I painted the finger nails of the young girls. I witnessed the joy of the children upon receiving a simple toy that may be the only one they ever got. So many beautiful smiles that were filled with pure gratitude that comes from the lack of material goods. They are appreciative of anything!



Mary (in green) with another volunteer, Grace, playing with play-doh in the village they visited.

Playing with the kids will be a special memory because we couldn't talk their language but found a way to "communicate" with each other. ~Mary, age 10

I think God wants me to remember the people and how little they have. I plan to not buy things I don't need. ~Sarah, age 9

The Director at Proyecto MAMA, San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Erlinda de Robelo, lost her husband on May 25th from a heart attack. Our condolences to Erlinda and her family during this difficult time. If you'd like to send her an email, please contact her at erlindaderobelo@proyectomama.org

One day as I was climbing up the hill to the nutrition center, God reminded me to walk step by step. The grade was so steep, that to look ahead would be too overwhelming. But just concentrating on the next step gave me strength to keep going. It is the same with God. We are climbing the mountain of life and to look too far up the hill can be intense. When we take one step at a time, God gives us the strength that we need for the moment.

Once I was home, I had more time to reflect and was reminded of the story about a young girl along a beach who was throwing starfish back into the ocean. When a passerby questioned her motive, she explained that she was throwing them back in so they wouldn't die on the beach exposed to the sun. The passerby commented that there were so many starfish, how could she make a difference. To this she replied, "It makes a difference for this one," as she threw another one back into the ocean.

I realized that this is why God wanted me to go to Honduras – to be reminded that I can make a difference for someone. I didn't have to solve all the problems with the trash or all the children with unsanitary living conditions. This is what MAMA is all about, making a difference for that family in that village for that day. I needed to be reminded that I can make a difference wherever I go as long as I am in the center of God's will.

The work we did in the villages was very hard - especially the concreting. Cementing the floors made me feel like a hero. I was amazed at the simplicity of the houses. I mean they had nothing. The families were so excited to be able to receive the blessing of a concrete floor. ~Caleb, age 12

The work we did in Honduras was fun because we were helping other people. I cemented floors and played with the kids. ~Jonathan, age 7



Caleb (right) helping with mixing cement. Wilson, Jonathan & Felix in back.



Support MAMA Project Mission Teams

Each year 10-15 teams travel to Honduras and serve in about 80 communities. You can support these teams by:

- **Joining a team.** There are openings in teams for August and September 2012 and many teams are forming in 2013.
- **Pray for the teams and team members.** Pray for safety, good health, and a heart to serve!
- **Financially support the mission teams.** We are exploring options of purchasing a mission team van and need financial support to make this a reality. Teams also need support to provide donations to communities where they are serving - Bibles, reading glasses, medicines, cement for floors, small toys, health kits, school supplies, soccer balls, etc.



Contact

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215-679-4338 to discuss ways
that you can support our
mission teams.*