

1. Americas Association for the Care of Children
 - a. New Mother's Project
 - b. \$44,003
 - c. Deborah Young
 - d. PO Box 2154 Boulder, CO 80306

2. **The main goal of the project** is to provide a training program that certifies ten women residing in/near Jalapa, Nicaragua as ongoing trainers providing education on prenatal care, labor and delivery, breastfeeding, the new mother's health, nutrition, and infant development in the first year of life. The outcomes are to reduce the impacts of poverty in pregnant women and their babies living in rural Nicaragua. The focus includes two villages and Casa Materna (the Maternal House). The objective of the trainers is to provide education to 850 women during the two-year period.

3. The **funding** has not significantly changed

4. **The context is the same.** However, there was an initial hurdle. At the onset of the project the Nicaragua government had asked many international NGO's to leave the country due to the political climate and the tension of Chinese/Nicaraguan canal through Nicaragua. This was an unforeseen challenge when the proposal was written. AACC has had a presence in Jalapa since 1997. Due to past positive collaborations between AACC the local University and Ministries, the University of Martin Lutero advocated for the AACC and the NMP project. The University of Martin Lutero took the project under their jurisdiction, providing space for the project to meet, storage for our materials, and connections to the Municipality and the Ministry of Health, i.e. Casa Materna. The Municipality would have had to receive permission from the central government office in Managua if the project were to be held under their jurisdiction. This is the first time INGOs would need permission from the central government to work in collaboration in the last 20 years. Local decision-making has been the policy for the last 20 years. In addition, to work under the Ministry of Health, the Ministry would have also needed to receive permission from the central Ministry of Health office in Managua. It can take up to 18 months to receive this permission. Since the University has the only nursing program in the area and already works with the Municipality and the Ministry of Health, once the project was under their jurisdiction the women in the project had access to Casa Materna and the villages. We organized this partnership between March-May of 2016, prior to the start of the project in June. Therefore, it had not impact on the project itself.

5. The **biggest challenges** the NMP trainers have experienced include:
 - a. To keep mom's in the program after their baby has turned 6 months old. Currently the trainers have provided home visits to 207 women; provided workshops to 328 women who have attended Casa Materna;

and have provided workshops, in villages who are not part of the home visit program, to 119 women. There is a 47% retention rate for women with babies 6 months or older. There is a higher rate of retention for home visits than for the workshops.

- b. The moms who arrive at Casa Materna have either problems with their pregnancy or live so far away that transportation would not be accessible when they went into labor. Many women are hesitant using Casa Materna because it usually means they have to leave their home sometime between 3 weeks and 3 months before delivery. Many of the moms have other children with no one to take care of them in the home. The NMP trainers have been advocates in the rural villages for Casa Materna. The NMP trainers provide education for the moms who live in Casa Materna awaiting delivery. Follow up with the women is challenging as they live throughout the Jalapa Valley, some places are 4-5 hour hikes into the mountains. It is unrealistic to follow up all of the women after birth. The NMP trainers would like to start to follow up the cases that are more at risk in terms of mom's well being and infant care.

6. **The adjustments** made to the original objectives for the second year of the project are to include:

- a. To address the retention concern: The NMP trainers would like to increase the retention rate of moms with babies 6 months and older to 80%. The main reasons why moms leave the program are: moms moved out of the two villages the project home visits are in (Escombray and Santa Marta), moms have returned to work, moms' felt they were bored with learning new information. To do this:
 - i. NMP trainers are receiving additional professional development to better engage moms in participatory ways during their home visits and workshops. The most common method of education is transmission. NMP trainers are working hard to shift this practice to participatory ways of learning.
 - ii. Professional development supporting the NMP trainers in offering a more playgroup like atmosphere with moms and babies/toddlers participating in a more active way during the workshops after pregnancy. The idea of moms getting together and playing with their children is new for the trainers (and for the moms). With the initial implementation of playgroup 'workshops' the reports from the NMP trainers has been quite positive. The moms seem to have a lot of fun, laughing and singing with their babies. The break from the everyday stress of life in and of itself may impact the moms' continuation with the program through the child's 18 month.

- iii. This idea of the Satisfaction interviews the NMP trainers came from the NMP trainers' analysis of their data for this report. They identified retention as a concern. The NMP trainers initiated a Satisfaction interview to a random sample (10%) from the women who have left the project. They now do this interview with all women who leave the project.
- b. The adjustment for the women from Casa Materna. The NMP trainers would like to follow up with the women with higher risk for either the women or the infant. This requires additional funds for transportation. AACC is working on raising funds to address this transportation request.

7. How the program has achieved the objectives thus far:

- a. Thus far AACC has sent four trainers from the US to cover the prenatal and child development topics in three trainings. In addition, eight university students studying early childhood or psychology came to Jalapa to support the project and the Brain Awareness Conference. The students offered their services during the conference attending to the conference registration and logistics. The students support the NMP trainers by providing extra hands to make materials for the home visits and workshops. They students shadowed the NMP trainers during their work adding to the visibility to their work. The students worked with NMP for two weeks. The visibility and feedback provided by the students to the NMP trainers was quite helpful and most enjoyable for the NMP trainers. The students were amazed at how easily the NMP trainers were able to adapt science based facts of the brain from the conference to women living in rural areas, many of them illiterate. The topics the students found most relevant were the topics around environmental toxins (The Jalapa area is economically based in tobacco growing which uses an abundance of pesticides, fertilizers, and other toxic chemicals in the processing of the leaves); the importance of nutrition on the brain, the importance of positive shared emotional experiences on the growing brain, and the impact of repeated trauma on the growing brain. The NMP women were trained to 'make' brains from pipe cleaners and straws. They then taught the moms how to do this in their workshops. The students provided some extra needed hands for the NMP trainers first time bringing these modules to the field.
- b. The NMP trainees have completed their modules
- c. Currently the trainers have provided home visits to 207 women and have provided workshops to 328 women in Casa Materna and workshops, in villages who are not part of the home visit program, to 119 women. In addition, 311 children have attended story hours that are provided while one NMP trainers visit with the mom in the home or NMP trainers provide the workshop/playgroup to moms. This is the direct impact. The indirect impact, those who have attended and

are not pregnant, including partners, grandmas, sisters; equal 159 people. Indirect impact that is not measured includes those who moms in the project talk to but who do not attend home visits or workshops.

- d. The NMP trainers are increasing their data collection efforts, both quality and quantity, over the next 6 months followed by another self-assessment of their work to have a better idea of the indirect impact of their project. In addition, from their initial analysis of their data collected, they have identified gaps that they did not collect data on and are designing tools to do this. The Satisfaction interview is one of those tools. (On a personal note, it is really exciting to watch the NMP trainers' enthusiasm when they learn about how the data they collect informs their work. This is brand new concept for the women. This leads to empowerment of the women, evidenced by the decision-making processes they are designing and implementing as a team. Their teaming abilities are increasing and being recognized by the university. The university is now interested in professional development for their teachers in the self-reflection process.)
- e. In March, 2017 the NMP trainers attended a Brain Awareness Conference. The presenters were graduate and postgraduate students studying neuroscience from the University of Utah. They presenters were from the US and Mexico. The first two days of the conference were spent in 6 one-hour sessions on new information. The third day was review, planning, and practicing to share the new information to the women in the NMP program. There were 90 participants for the first two days and 40 participants for the third day. The 40 participants included teachers from the University, from the agricultural tertiary school - CETA, students from the nursing program University of Martin Lutero, administrators from the University of Martin Lutero, and members from other civic organizations. Days four and five were spent in the field sharing the information NMP trainers learned in a culturally responsive manner. The presenters followed the NMP trainers into the field to support the content.
- f. Another success of the program is that the Ministry of Health adopted the NMP trainers to become official brigadistas for the Ministry. This means that when they are working in the villages they can state they are representatives of the Ministry as well as a partner of the University of Martin Lutero under the New Mother's Profram. Their credibility is gaining in the Jalapa Valley. We have been invited to present to the Ministry of Health in Ocotal, the regional office in June 2018. The director of the University of Martin Lutero is working on getting us a meeting with the central office of the Ministry of Health in Managua for June of 2018. This is great news! and has addressed one of the biggest and first challenges encountered when the program started – that of being accepted by the Ministry of Health with their

- new regulations by the central office in Managua to continue working with INGOs.
- g. The partnership with the University of Martin Lutero has provided further collaboration between several departments at the university. Current students working in the agricultural department are using their internships to provide information to the moms on soil preparation, planting, garden maintenance, and harvesting when the first crops are ready. The students in the program in nutrition will be providing baking classes starting in late July after the summer break. Ovens are being constructed during July in the two villages and at Casa Materna. Once they are completed and students arrive back from school break, some of the students from the program at Martin Lutero will begin teaching baking and cooking classes to the moms as part of their internship requirement.
 - h. Lastly, the NMP trainees had a both and float for the mother's day parade. There is a photo of their poster.
8. So far the challenges that have arisen have been attended to through self-reflection of the NMP trainers along with the development of their research and assessment skills. The observable growth and commitment of the NMP trainers in compassion of their community members, compassion toward each other, their knowledge in prenatal care and child development, their skills in home visits and workshops, and their professional development skills as a team has been delightful to witness. More importantly, the confidence, skills in collaboration, and empowerment both personally, professionally and as a team the NMP trainers have displayed goes beyond the initial hope of the project.

Photographs – uploaded to dropbox

Message to donors

Thank you to all who have supported the New Mother's Project in Jalapa, Nicaragua. The impact the NMP trainers are having on their community is beyond initial expectations. During my last visit in March-April 2017 NMP trainers brought me to a few of the cases they found while engaged in their work and wanted extra support in. One, a just turned 17-year-old woman who has four children; her newest, 2 months old, her twins not quite 12 months old, and her 2 year old. The mom reported allergies on one of the twins and invited me to the home. The allergies turned out to be one of the worse diaper rashes I have seen. For two weeks the NMP trainers worked with the mom to clean her home, learn how to wash her babies, take care of her babies in terms of feeding, routine care, and stimulation and helped her attend the hospital (by watching the children for her) for family planning information and suggestions. The difference between when she joined the program at 6 months pregnant and her present living situation is quite different.

Case two, included a mom with five children. This mom lives in a one-room home, no water, no latrine, and no electricity. The baby at three months old became quite ill. Baby and mom had to stay in the hospital. The fourteen-year-old son took care of the 12 year old, 9 year old and 4 year old. The love and tenderness the 14 year old displayed with his siblings could only come from a loving connection within his family. The Ministry of Family was about to take the children away from the mom for negligence, however NMP trainers intervened explaining the situation to the Ministry representative. The mom had done nothing wrong, she is simply living in abject poverty. She needed help and support, not to have her children taken away. She had to stay in the hospital for over a month, her four year old sleeping on the floor in the hospital while the 14 year old prepared meals and got his brother ready for school.

The third case I will share with you is a woman who has four children and a new baby. She is single and is impacted by severe poverty. NMP has helped her talk with teachers at the local school to allow her youngest children to attend preschool together while the older daughter (9 years of age) attends the nearby elementary school. Prior to this negotiation the children were home alone all day long. The children now attend school in the morning and the teachers at the preschool wait for the young girl to return from school to pick up her siblings. The NMP trainers have worked out temporary child care for the new baby and are still working out a more permanent childcare situation for the baby while mom works during the day and the other children are at school.

NMP trainers follow up weekly and as needed with cases such as these. Along with severe cases, the vast majority of the women NMP trainers share information with have not had access to this information. There are numerous stories about from the participants about their gratitude for knowing what is happening to their body, about how their baby is growing, what to expect during labor and delivery, and simply to have another woman to talk with. Without this project, moms in these situations would have few or no advocates or alternatives. Thank you for believing in the NMP project and making a huge difference in many women's lives. You are very appreciated with much gratitude from AACC.

Letters of appreciation from the NMP trainees are uploaded to the dropbox

Budget expenses uploaded to Dropbox