

# Visitors witness Rainbow Network's work on Go & See tours

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(Photo: Submitted photo)

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It was on a Go & See visit to Nicaragua with Rainbow Network that Luke Nixon saw a little boy with club feet. He was told that the boy would never walk.

“That bugged me,” Nixon, a Springfield businessman, said. When he returned home, he called the Rainbow Network office and asked about the boy, Ervin, and asked what he could do to help. He donated the money for surgery. Then the miracle happened. Ervin now walks and even plays soccer. Then another miracle. Nixon donated the money for Joiner, an 8-year-old who also had club feet and had never walked.

Today, Nixon has photos of both boys on his desk at the office. “Looking at their smiling faces ... there’s no amount of money that can make you feel warm in your heart like that,” he said, his voice cracking. “If you ever think you’re having a bad day, I look at that and see Joiner in a wheelchair after a surgery. I think, if Joiner can smile today, I can.”

Rainbow Network is inviting people to join its next Go & See April 17-23. Nixon knows that every person who goes will have his or her own experience and find their own reasons for deciding whether to become a supporter, but he is confident that they will be impressed.



A scene from a Rainbow Network community in Nicaragua. (Photo: Submitted photo)

## Walking miracles

Rainbow Network, a Springfield-based non-profit that works with the poor in rural Nicaragua, offers Go & See trips each year, inviting anyone interested to see the work it does firsthand. This year's trip is called Walking Miracles. The Bible is full of stories of miracles, including those when the lame are healed and walk again. That is the kind of miracle Luke Nixon made possible, the kind of miracles that happen every day, thanks to Rainbow Network and its supporters.

"People want to go down and see our work," said Keith Jaspers, founder and CEO of Rainbow Network. The Go & See event is a tour of several of the more than 112 communities that work with Rainbow Network. Each day, the visitors are taken to a community, along with Rainbow Network staff and a translator.

There, they learn about the four areas of ministry — housing, healthcare, education and economic development — and can talk directly with people who participate in those programs. "They can speak directly to people we are helping," Jaspers said. "We think that we have transparency far and beyond other organizations like us."

That transparency and the evidence that Rainbow Network does exactly what it says it will do with donor dollars is what impressed Claudia Hartner when she went on a Go & See last year. She learned about Rainbow Network and its work through her church, First & Calvary Presbyterian, which supports the ministry in a variety of ways.

"The trip was wonderful ... finding out all of the good things I learned about Rainbow were really true and the funds went exactly where they said," she said.

Her trip included visits to several medical clinics where she saw people getting basic medical care and met people whose lives were changed because of that care. "The generosity of spirit, their joy, it's hard to describe," she said.

## Joiner walks

Joiner Ramon Perez Urtado took his first steps in January of 2015 at 8 years old. Four years earlier, Joiner was a mystery, kept hidden from sight because of a cleft palate and club feet. When Rainbow representatives finally learned about Joiner they stepped in immediately. The little boy needed surgery to correct his condition and therapy to learn to walk.



Megan Munzlinger loves to tell the story of Joiner, but never fails to tear up in the telling. *(Photo: Submitted photo)*

The cost was well beyond anything his family could afford to pay. His father works in the coffee fields, making barely enough money to feed his family. So, when Nixon agreed to pay for the surgeries and the needed physical therapy, it was like a miracle from God for the family.

Joiner is an inspiration to almost anyone who meets him. The tiny boy's dogged determination and wide smile have warmed many hearts, including that of Megan Munzlinger, Rainbow Network's development director and the host of the upcoming Go & See. Like Nixon, she keeps a picture of the little boy on her desk to lift her heart when she is down and to remind her of the miracles God performs through Rainbow Network. She loves to tell the story of Joiner, but never fails to tear up in the telling.

Visitors will meet Joiner, and they will meet Sarah Janellis, a sassy teenager who was unable to stand or walk because the tendons, from her ankle to her hip, were pulling her legs up tight. The doctors at the children's hospital in Managua told her mother there was nothing to be done for her.





Visitors will meet Sarah Janellis, a sassy teenager who was unable to stand or walk until a Rainbow Network doctor arrived in the community and told her that the nonprofit could help. (Photo: Submitted photo)

Then a Rainbow doctor arrived in the community and told her that Rainbow could help. He took X-rays and did some tests and determined that surgery was the answer. The \$1,000 needed for the surgery was paid by Rainbow supporters, and soon after the tendons were straightened Sarah was walking for the first time at 6 years old. Her gait is still unsteady and slow, and she needs another surgery now that she is grown, but that doesn't stop her from walking down the rutted path from her house to the garden she tends or to school when the roads are not too muddy and slippery during the rainy season. She is determined to go on to college.

"I will continue to struggle, become more eager, and I will succeed," Sarah said of both her determination to walk and to succeed in life.

## Believe in miracles

These are just a few examples of "walking miracles" visitors will see during the Go & See. Dr. Will Moore, an internal medicine doctor at CoxHealth, remembered the many medical miracles he saw the first time he witnessed the work Rainbow Network does in Nicaragua.

Moore had been going down to Honduras and Nicaragua on medical mission trips through his church, Wesley United Methodist, for a few years when he encountered a group of folks from Springfield who were building houses in Nicaragua. They talked about Rainbow Network and all the work it does there.

"I actually learned about Rainbow Network in Nicaragua," said Moore. "Now, if that's not a God thing, I don't know what is."

He did a little research and learned that the Rainbow doctors help people year around, not just doing the “hit and run” kind of medicine the mission teams were doing. That inspired him. He wanted to support those doctors. That was 15 years ago, and Moore has been supporting the doctors in many ways, including taking medical staff down to Nicaragua at least once a year to help out at clinics and taking medical supplies and by serving on Rainbow Network’s board of directors. His church also started supporting Rainbow.

Moore sees medical “miracles” happening every day in the Rainbow communities. He says many times they are conditions that would be easily treated in the United States, but with limited access to medical care they have progressed with serious complications. “What’s really exciting,” he said, “in certain situations, we can reverse that immediately. That results in a miracle for those people.”



Jay Guffey has been a Rainbow Network supporter since the nonprofit started in 1995. *(Photo: Submitted photo)*

Jay Guffey has been a Rainbow Network supporter since it started in 1995. In fact, it was on the very first “go and see,” when he and Keith Jaspers joined Habitat For Humanity founder Millard Fuller in Nicaragua in 1980s, that the seeds of Rainbow Network were planted. They saw the poverty and the needs, and later Guffey encouraged Jaspers when he started Rainbow Network. Today, he serves as president of the Rainbow board of directors. He sees miracles in everything Rainbow does.

“There are several aspects to the Rainbow Network that excite me about the work that is done in rural Nicaragua,” he explained. “This is a Christian ministry that touches lives where they live and develops community. It is also a program where Nicaraguans are helping Nicaraguans.”

He explained that funds raised in the United States provide the resources for education, healthcare, economic development and housing. “The goal is to stabilize a community and help them become self-sufficient,” he said. The funds used in the community for homes and micro loans become a perpetual resource, paid back over time and reinvested in the community.

“All of this work is a partnership,” he added. “It is a blessing to see a community that started with Rainbow over 20 years ago which has stabilized as a result of this partnership.”

Explaining the programs, telling the stories and sharing the excitement simply isn’t enough. Seeing the work up close, meeting the people in the stories and sharing the joy with families who live in Rainbow Network communities is the best way to believe in miracles.

## WANT TO GO?

To learn more about participating in a Go & See, call the Rainbow Network office at 417-889-8088, email [info@rainbownetwork.org](mailto:info@rainbownetwork.org) or visit [www.goandsee.org](http://www.goandsee.org).

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