

Rainbow Network makes an impact

Foreign charities help most vulnerable

Written by Roger Ray
FOR THE NEWS-LEADER

With the help of generous donations from oil rich Venezuela, the government of Nicaragua is actually making inroads into creating necessary infrastructure. Roads that were nearly impassable five years ago are now in good condition, public schools are being rebuilt, there are new hospitals and a greater effort to provide food to the rural poor. The ravages of the civil wars of the late 20th century are fading into memory as a more stable government is managing to finally honor some of their campaign promises.

The work of the Rainbow Network has evolved to respond to the changing circumstances. The lives of the poor in the most rural areas still rely on foreign charities not only to create an economy where none existed and to be able to take advantage of new government programs.

The eight physicians and two dentists employed by Rainbow work with a population too isolated to reasonably be served at the government clinics, though Rainbow staff often respond to a plea for help to transport a patient from the isolated mountain villages to the hospitals to give birth or have emergency surgery.

Rainbow Network founder Keith Jaspers makes a special effort to visit with those who have received extraordinary help through the years such as Carlos Rosales, who suffers from spina bifida. Now 19 years old, Carlos lives in a small house in La Corona with his mother and four siblings. Without Jasper's continued support in subsequent surgeries, he would not have survived the harsh circumstances of his family's existence.

Dr. Jolmileth Videa visits and travels among the Rainbow supported villages near San Ramon, where she sees between 40 and 60 patients a day, many, such as Harvin Sotelo, who have been saved only through special donations from Rainbow supporters. Harvin suffers from a degenerative disease which made him unable to walk for the first half of his 13 years of life. Now he walks very well, though is always facing another surgery to repair disabling deformities in his hands and back.

Though struggling to join the 21st century in many ways, the most vulnerable poor of Central America still look to charities from surrounding nations to survive.

About The Rainbow Network

Keith Jaspers, founder of the Rainbow Network, a non-governmental organization doing relief work in Nicaragua, was recently called back out of retirement to give direction to the Rainbow Network as they attempt to rebuild their donor base. Roger Ray is a former board member of the Rainbow Network and a regular contributor to the News-Leader. The two are traveling together in Nicaragua this week, visiting some of the more than 100 rural villages served by the Rainbow Network. Ray will be submitting stories about their travels this week.