

Scholarship program paves way out of poverty

Rainbow scholars



**ROBING RENE
PUERTO SANCHEZ**

Robing is 14 and in his first year of high school. He travels 10 kilometers to the nearest school.

Robing

"Education is very important because I can improve myself and become someone intelligent with a good job," he says in a translation provided by Rainbow Network.

There are eight people in his family. His parents earn about \$28 a month working in agriculture.

"In my free time, I help my mother look for wood to cook and wash the clothes because it's tough. When I am finished helping, I study.... I want to be a doctor and financially help my family. I dream of helping my family."



**KAREN
DEL ROSARIO
ARAUZ TORREZ**

Karen is 16 and in her first year of high school. She travels by bus or walks six kilometers to school.

Karen

She and her parents, two brothers and one sister live in a small house in El Tigre, a small community of about 70 families.

"The people are poor, but they are close and helpful to each other," she says.

Karen hopes to become a secretary.

"Education is very important to me because I want to become a professional and be able to get a good job and support my family," she says.

HOW TO HELP

To learn how to help these and other Nicaraguan students attend high school through Rainbow Network scholarships, call Rainbow network at 889-8088 or follow a

Web link to the Rainbow Network's Web site by clicking on this story at News-Leader.com

By Linda Leicht
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Visiting students in a Nicaraguan high school gave Mark Harsen a new appreciation for the significance of an education.

Harsen works at Missouri State University in Springfield and sees how higher education can change the lives of young people, but he knows that in rural Nicaragua, just getting a high school education can mean a chance to move out of poverty.

So Harsen and his wife, Dorothy, support the Rainbow Network scholarship program to help a student realize the possibilities of success.

"You are literally providing them a life-changing experience that they don't have on their own," said Harsen, who has provided that experience for six students over the past years.

Rainbow Network is a Springfield-based organization that works with the poor in rural Nicaragua. For \$22 a month, supporters can pay for a student's tuition, uniforms, books and transportation.

In a country where a third of the adults cannot read or write, giving the gift of an education will have an impact that reaches well beyond the student, said Keith Jaspers, founder of Rainbow Network.

"They end up back in their community in a leadership position," he said. "They are the best-educated people in their villages. People trust them to make decisions for the communities."

In December, 170 Rainbow Network scholarship students will graduate from high school. Rainbow works with about 52,000 people in 121 communities. These students have more than doubled the number of high school graduates in those communities, and the numbers are rising each year.

Scholarships make that possible, Jaspers said. Nearly half the people in Nicaragua live below the poverty line, and in the rural communities that statistic is

even higher. Paying for high school, which is not offered free, would be impossible for most of the families in the Rainbow Network communities.

The scholarships provide an education for more than the students, who must repay their scholarship with community service. Many return to teach in the Rainbow Network-supported elementary schools in their communities.

"They are teaching their little brothers and sisters and

cousins how to read and write," said Jaspers. "They're learning to serve their community and that so much more is possible than what they had ever dreamed of."

Empowerment is the goal of Rainbow Network, said Rocky Levell, chairman of the board of directors. "I believe in it," he said. "Being down there as many times as I have, I believe it's a change of future. There are enough success stories down there to say this works."

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