

Education Mission

***Education breeds confidence,
Confidence breeds hope,
Hope breeds peace.***

- Confucious

It is difficult to understand the reality of primary education in Honduras when primary education in the US is understood as a right and is taken for granted. Here, education is only mandated through the sixth grade, and Honduras can now essentially claim that through the sixth grade it is universal. Honduras is attempting to mandate education through the ninth grade and realize the goal of universal education up through that level, but, until the present, this has failed. In a place as rural and poor as the Frontera of Intibucá, children more often than not leave school after six years in order to work outside or inside the home. Primary education is supposedly “free” in Honduras, but children are expected to pay for incidentals such as uniforms, materials, and transportation. These costs become greater in the higher levels of primary education. Thus, most children leave after six grades because costs are beyond family means and the loss of a family member who could potentially generate income is not tenable.



Education from kindergarten to sixth grade is tremendously inferior from what we are accustomed to in the US. Buildings are falling down and classrooms are overcrowded. We have witnessed forty or fifty children from three different grades sitting on plastic chairs without desks under a makeshift, aluminum paneled roof suspended on sticks. Books and other materials are simply not available. Teachers are totally unprepared and often simply not present. Children are fortunate if after six years they “graduate” with basic literacy.

Shoulder to Shoulder seeks to change this reality, both for the children we can serve directly as well as for the Honduran educational system. We are doing this presently in three areas.

The Good Shepherd Bilingual School

Our school started as a private, bilingual school. The idea was to offer quality bilingual education in an area where none are available. There are lots of private, bilingual schools in Honduras, particularly in the major cities. Whereas they offer alternatives to the poor quality, public schools to those who can afford it and for those fortunate enough to receive grants, they do little to challenge the public school system. Shoulder to Shoulder felt that having a private school was good, but feared it was limiting and perhaps not sustainable. Certainly it did not offer a challenge to the public system. In 2014, Shoulder to Shoulder,

the mayors' association of Southern Intibucá, and the Honduran Ministry of Education, formed a partnership to run the school. Our bilingual teachers and the administration of the school are provided by the Ministry of Education and the school is public. The mayors' association provides cleaning, security, utilities and other physical support for the school. Shoulder to Shoulder is providing for excellence in education, native English-speaking volunteers, quality educational materials and support, and the completion of the buildings. This partnership, unique in all of Honduras, insures quality, bilingual education with public accessibility. It is sustainable and challenges the public education system to find creative means of advancing excellence in education.



In February, we begin our fourth year, offering classes from kindergarten through third grade. We completed the construction of a second building this August, adding three new classrooms. We have a technology classroom with computers, a large screen TV, and tablets where the children access state-of-the-art curriculum through Khan Academy. We will begin the year with three volunteers and expect to add another one before the year ends in November. Twelve students are receiving sponsorships in order to support ambitious projects to maintain quality education. We have produced an excellent, documentary style video of the amazing mission of the school that is available on our website.

Scholarships

For years, Shoulder to Shoulder has supported young people to continue their education beyond the sixth grade. Particular donors support this program. These children's families understand the value of education, but lack the relatively modest financial resources to keep their children in school. The program is based on need and merit, so most children stay in the program through graduation from High School. Many have gone on to higher education. We also have four young people receiving financial assistance from particular donors to attend college.

2015 Report on Scholarship Program

| Municipality | # of Children in Program | # of High School Graduates |
|--------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Camasca | 43 | 4 |
| Concepción | 30 | 8 |
| Magdalena | 15 | 1 |
| Santa Lucia | 15 | 0 |

With the commitment of donors to this program, we will be able to continue offering the scholarships to those enrolled in the program and replace those who have graduated with new students. We will be searching out students who qualify by way of need and merit in the town of San Antonio, expanding the program's impact. Many of our university partners who have ongoing missions associated with Shoulder

to Shoulder also offer scholarship programs. Without these programs, many children would not have the opportunity of a complete education, something generally considered a right in the US.



Yo Puedo

A particular tragic, side-effect of poverty is low self-esteem among young people. Few opportunities for personal advancement create a sense of hopelessness. For girls this can often lead to poor decisions in personal relationships and early pregnancies. Children having children solidifies and extends the vicious cycle of poverty from generation to generation. Shoulder to Shoulder has initiated the program Yo Puedo (I Am Able) to provide young girls to see themselves as competent and capable. The program has two components. The first is educational and formational. Girls are taught about their bodies, their dignity as emerging women, and their rights to make choices. They are encouraged to see themselves with potentials they had previously not imagined. They learn that they are uniquely gifted and are able to assert themselves. The second component is vocational. It is the practical aspect of providing them the opportunity to learn manual crafts and to set up a business. They learn how to make jewelry, or items of clothing, or other crafts. They are given seed money that they invest into a small business. The girls are amazed when they are able to pay back their small capital loan and to make a profit that they reinvest.



The bottom line here is that the girls in the program learn that they are able. They are not victims of their culture. They are not simply destined to live out a cycle of poverty. They grow in the self-esteem that proudly declares you can be who you chose to be. Yo Puedo is now in 13 schools throughout the Frontier region. With your generosity and commitment, we can extend this program.