

Beyond in Education

When Dr. Jeff Heck visited Santa Lucia 26 years ago, he witnessed the effects of extreme, devastating poverty and isolation. As a doctor, he acted to meet the immediate needs. This was a reasonable and charitable response. He must have returned to Cincinnati after that short trip with mixed and turbulent emotions, pondering upon what he and others with him were able to accomplish, but also what was left undone. He must have questioned, "What more can I do?" If he asked that question of himself, his honest answer would have been "not much". The tremendous need, the overwhelming effects of poverty, was so deeply embedded and entrenched that neither one man, nor a small group of medical professionals, could have possibly made a significant impact upon it. Realizing that, he might have simply decided to do what he could and accept the limits of his generous and compassionate response. But rather than this, he sought the means to move beyond those limits. He sought partnerships, he moved hearts, he invested in relationships, and he considered how to realign systems that supported ongoing oppression so that they would support liberating development. His passion and effort created a synergy, and the resources that were focused on Santa Lucia and the other areas of the Frontera began to change the landscape and environment.



Because of this "beyond" response, and the movement it inspired and sustained, Shoulder to Shoulder exists. But more important than the existence of Shoulder to Shoulder, the people of the Frontera region of Intibucá have direct access to health care. This system of health care delivery is today sustainable. Two major clinics in Santa Lucia and Concepción support ongoing care at over twenty satellite clinics throughout the challenging, mountainous territory, and over 100 Honduran health professionals and administrators are employed full time. The health care system continues to be augmented and supported by Shoulder to Shoulder especially in the work of medical service teams that regularly visit. Clearly, however, health care delivery on the Frontera has been permanently established and will continue to develop the delivery of quality service.



No one could argue against Shoulder to Shoulder's success in creating a system of sustainable health care delivery on the Frontera. And yet in other areas where the effects of poverty are clearly systematically entrenched, there is room to move beyond. One of the most obvious of these areas is primary and secondary education. Shoulder to Shoulder has always made a generous, compassionate response to the needs of young persons to secure a quality education. We have provided scholarships for students to continue education beyond the sixth grade. We have created the program Yo Puedo to give fifth and sixth grade girls a sense of confidence and worth, providing them opportunities that are too frequently denied them by early pregnancies. We have established a quality, bilingual school that has no equal on the Frontera, or even in Honduras. Even so, these responses are immediate and obvious, having little effect on the societal forces that sustain an inadequate educational system. Pondering this, as Dr. Jeff Heck must have pondered the inadequacy of the health care system, we realize that there is a "beyond" response that demands our attention.



We have already partnered with the Honduran Ministry of Education and the municipal association on the Frontera to create a quality, bilingual school. We have already reached out and found generous sponsors who provide ongoing material support for the mission of the school. Still, the other primary and secondary academic institutions continue to offer a substandard level of education to the great majority of children living on the Frontera. Consistent with the mission of Shoulder to Shoulder that Dr. Heck realized in health care, we propose an ambitious mission to radically transform education on the Frontera. With our partnership with the Ministry of Education and the municipal association, with the inclusion of new associates in professional educational development in the United States, with the

generosity of an expanding donor base, while working Shoulder to Shoulder with the students, parents, and all citizens on the Frontera, we will create a sustainable system of quality education on the Frontera that will allow give all children the opportunity for academic and professional success.

This has already begun. We have just initiated a pilot program at the Saint Thomas Aquinas High School in Camasca where students can access first-class, computer assisted learning through the use of proven technology and curriculum. We are developing relationships with individual professionals and administrators, institutions and associations, and people of good will, confidence, and generosity, in Honduras and the United States, in order to generate a synergetic movement of change. As medical professionals from universities and associations came to the Frontera to offer their time and service, today we will search out universities and associations who will invest in our education mission. It is certainly an ambitious mission that requires a “beyond” response.



Is this nothing more than a fanciful dream? Yes, it most certainly is. Still, I wonder how many doubters said the same thing to Dr. Jeff Heck 26 years ago. Shoulder to Shoulder knows how miracles become reality in the “beyond” response. Please, shoulder this mission with us so that the seemingly impossible becomes reality.