

Nuñoa Project: Review of Humanitarian Work in 2014

During the past year the Nuñoa Project (NP) has undertaken three significant humanitarian programs. These have drawn high praise from residents of the town and countryside, and have served as good publicity to our donor community.

1. Wheel Chair Project

Building on efforts of the year before when several wheel chairs were donated, the NP bought 7 more chairs and several walkers. Handicapped persons in need were identified by town authorities and who took responsibility for purchasing (\$150 per chair) and transporting the quality equipment from a nearby city to Nuñoa. The wheel chairs were presented in a ceremony in front of the town hall with all town authorities present and a substantial crowd of onlookers. (see photo)

One by one the recipients were helped into their chairs by the police and their elation was evident. These ranged from the elderly to teen-aged children. In cases where an individual was unable to attend we went to their homes. In one case we carried the chair up a rickety set of stairs to the family's second floor dormitory where a ten year-old girl lay in bed. The gleam in her eyes as she viewed the sparkling new chair and realized she could navigate the streets to visit friends was overwhelming to all present. For an elderly woman wheeled transport meant that she, too, could leave home and go shopping in the market.

We hope to continue this life changing program for the chairs are financially out of reach of the poorer people of Nuñoa. Their unfortunate alternative is to move from bed to a chair outside the house all day, or negotiate the streets in slow motion supported by two walking sticks in search of basic needs.

2. Blanket Project

For the past several years climate change has severely affected the high Andes and especially the *altiplano* of the Puno Department of southern Peru where Nuñoa is located. Excessive rainfall, hail, frosts and snow have contributed to high mortality among young animals and even children. I recall lying in bed and hearing the near freezing rain pounding on the tin roof, wondering of how the newborns out in the open pasture could endure such hypothermia. Even in the grass thatched huts of the pastoralists the roof straw starts leaking when saturated and so one starts a day of herding already damp. Among animal and humans, and especially the young, hypothermia results in a respiratory cold that can end up in pneumonia. For those in the more remote areas of Nuñoa it is a day's walk to the health center and even there one must purchase expensive antibiotics and find

someone to stay with. Hence, a general response is to wait and see if the cold will pass and apply herbal remedies.

Fortuitously, when in Nuñoa last June to present the wheel chairs an email arrived from a former student who had worked there in 1965. He explained how profoundly his brief Nuñoa experience had influenced him and indicated he would like to help the people of Nuñoa. At the same time a social worker in one of the highest and remote communities reported an urgent need for blankets and rain resistant shawls to protect the herders from the exceptionally cold and rainy weather. With a donation of \$1000 plus some funds from the Nuñoa Project we were able to provide blankets and shawls to 35 households. Their gratitude was expressed in words and a formal letter mostly signed with fingerprints. (See photo).

Here again we are committed to extend this program to other rural communities in need as well as those in town living on the margins. At \$13 apiece for a blanket it is hoped that visitors to our website would be willing to contribute at least this amount to ensure a warm sleep for a highland family.

Yarn Spinning Project

The Nuñoa area has the highest number of alpacas and produces some of the finest fiber in the Peruvian highlands. In addition there is a slaughter house in town that produces meat products. Unfortunately, in this land of relative abundance most of the production gets sold to buyers from the outside who pay minimal prices and practice manipulative purchasing agreements. One consequence of this is that young people no longer wish to follow their parents into herding and migrate out of Nuñoa seeking employment in larger towns and cities. A resulting labor shortage, in turn, puts additional pressure on herding families, and some are forced to move to town even though employment possibilities are low. Women get paid about half of a man's salary for comparable work, and there is a high percentage single woman households since men also migrate out for extended periods in search of work.

With this as background the NP has been searching for ways to develop value added products that could use local products and use the skills of local people. Last summer we were approached by a group mostly poor men and women, some of these in wheelchairs (see photo). They had formed a spinning association of 17 persons that used local alpaca fiber to spin into yarn for the local weavers cooperative (Artesanos Alpacas Nuñoa) and other regional markets. Whereas Nuñoa people have a long tradition of making textiles household production has constraints in the amount of quality fiber

available and the ability to thoroughly clean it. In forming a yarn spinning association quality control can be exercised. Clean, uniform yarn of superior fiber is in demand.

The group requested assistance in renting a building and equipment for cleaning, carting, and hand spinning. We, in turn, asked for a business plan, assessed the competency of their leadership, and asked for a monthly accounting of progress. Thus far we are pleased with the results and have donated \$5000 in assistance. We are optimistic about the group's success not only because the income gained will directly assist the women's families, but may well serve as an impetus for the creation of other micro-enterprises in a town that desperately needs employment opportunities. Finally, such a project links our mission of serving people and alpacas.

We will continue to monitor the progress of the association and make a formal evaluation this coming July 2015. Should the results be positive we plan to continue to support their efforts in hiring more people and expanding their markets.

In summary, we are encouraged that these three projects have directly assisted people in real need, and in the case of the spinning project facilitated a grass roots effort that has considerable potential. It is doubtful that such support would be available without our efforts.