

Report on Nuñoa Project Mission, October 2015

Submitted by Brooke Thomas, Vice President

BLANKET PROJECT

As part of our ongoing humanitarian effort Brooke Thomas accompanied by three former anthropology researchers representing the project returned to the *altiplano* town of Nuñoa in October. There they distributed 140 blankets, 5 wheel chairs, and assessed the progress of a yarn spinning group the project is assisting.



The blanket project was in response to the very cold temperatures in the highlands over the past several years that contribute to both animal and human mortality, especially among the young. Two remote and very high villages, one at 16,500 feet elevation, were selected for distribution.

These are some of the

highest human habitation sites in the Andes and being above the agricultural zone are solely dependent on their camelid products. High quality Peruvian blankets were gratefully received by community members who arrived at the village meeting house from miles away. In the background were patches of snow and above these the receding permanent snow fields.



Pumas, largely absent below near the town, come out of the hills and prey on the alpacas and vicuña, and during the birthing season condors are reported to take newborns. Clearly these folks are living on the edge as climate change is imposing increasingly unpredictable conditions on their pastoral way of

life.

WHEELCHAIR PROJECT

Wheel chair donations were presented at a ceremony in front of the town hall with the Town Council present. This was accompanied by a parade of over 30 indigenous rural communities,



each with its own banner, and about 150 individuals - young and old, men and women - marching with weathered, stern faces. It was an impressive display of how proud Andean people have become of their heritage and customs in a land that two decades ago suppressed such dignity.



The wheel chairs are very durable and their front wheels large enough to able to negotiate the cobblestone streets. An old man with a club foot, who sells medicinal herbs on the street, did a jig upon receiving his crutches to the crowd's amusement. And after the ceremony was over two young men, paralyzed from the waist down, gleefully raced their chairs through the market. Alas, freedom on wheels!

YARN SPINNING PROJECT

For the past year the Nuñoa Project has been supporting a yarn spinning association (*Asociacion de Hiladores de Nuñoa*), a micro business consisting of 20-30 elderly women and handicapped individuals. The group has elected dedicated leaders with good organizational skills who have submitted a well thought out business plan. By and large they have met their expectations as presented in a progress report. First year expenses entailed renting a building, outfitting it with lights, tables, and chairs, and buying equipment for cleaning and processing the fiber. Quality of production is adequate for local sales but falls short of that needed to sell on the regional or national market: this is being addressed. Fortunately there is a knitting cooperative in town, *Manos Magicos*, that buys most of their yarn. This is a considerably superior product to that produced at home since better fiber is selected, it is thoroughly cleaned, and then graded by quality and fineness.



In meeting the spinners the extent of deformities was apparent from their handshakes. Nevertheless, the members are assigned tasks they can perform well.

The interior of the building was well lit and orderly, and there was a sense of relaxed enjoyment in carrying out their work. This pleased me considerably since the association is not only giving work to individuals of marginal means but serves as a vanguard model for other groups in town that could take raw material such as meat, hides and agricultural goods and transform them into a value added products.

I had asked Director Celia Quispe Lima for a proposal for this coming year in advance of our arrival. Following the visit to the workshop we discussed their upcoming needs. Foremost was to cover another year of rent that comes due this



December. Beyond this are salaries for a workplace coordinator, an accountant, and someone who can expand the marketing of their product beyond Nuñoa. Equipment is largely in place and little more is needed except for another table. They do need to register the association as a business in order to participate in fairs: this will require lawyer's fees. Celia mentioned that she is volunteering her time but is

constrained by her duties as a math teacher at the school and mother of a large family. She cannot continue to take on the responsibilities of her job without a salary.

With your help we anticipate continued support for this group of dedicated individuals. Our overall objective is to help Andean people through their own efforts to build a lasting infrastructure where they improve the conditions of their lives. Nevertheless, there are emergencies that arise like the blanket distribution and wheel chair donations that need immediate attention and where no other option is available. Here, too, we are poised to assist. You are thanked immensely for your support.