

How We Help

How we help is as important as the assistance we provide.

Friendship - We build cooperative and supportive relationships by being in the colonias every week. Friendship is an honest and on-going human relationship. We strive to avoid paternalism. All parties are treated as equals. There is no requirement to participate in a church service, a religion or a political party. We strive to help in ways where we are not a critical resource. We do not want the people to be dependent upon us or our good-will. We want to work together as friends.

We try to help these people to solve their own problems. We work side-by-side with our friends in the colonias. We try to provide ways for the people to earn what is needed to solve their problems.

We feed thousands of children at elementary schools that teachers describe as 'too hungry to concentrate'. With the assistance of Giving Hope World-Wide, the parents of the children, and Paper Houses Across the Border, cafeterias are built and children are fed. This program was initiated when teachers were asked to tell us their most pressing need at school. We expected them to ask for books, paper, school-desks or building repairs. We were stunned when every teacher said that the most pressing need in the schools was to find a way to feed these little children. One teacher summed it up by saying, "No matter what books, computers, or other things are provided, these little children arrive at school too hungry to concentrate."

We try to provide medical care that is otherwise unavailable. We help many who are in wheel-chairs, cannot hear, and are legally blind because they cannot (and probably never will) be able to pay. Sometimes, transportation is all that is needed. Other times, we cover the family's lost wages and often we pay for the medial procedures.

Bringing people from the United States into the colonias can be the most rewarding thing that we do. Our experience has been that the visitors from the U.S. benefit much more than the Mexican people we help during these visits. On most of these trips we do not paint buildings, construct houses, or repair schools. (We meet those needs by paying Mexican people and by purchasing items in Mexican stores. These people need the work and the stores need to stay in business to employ the people in the colonias).

We walk the streets of the poor. We visit families in their homes. We visit teachers, volunteers and children at the schools. We visit shelters and work side-by-side with Mexican volunteers as they help their own community. We share meals with migrants. We work with volunteers from the drug treatment center. At the end of the day, we begin to understand many things about Mexico and about whom we are and who we want to become. Our experience of mission helps us to become the person we always hoped we would be. Many people instantly become addicted to mission!

One of our most important accomplishments is for US to ask the question, "Who do I want to become?" It is not about changing others. It is about changing us.

Another important part of what we do is learning and improving the way that charity best works in the colonias along the border. We are not the same

organization that was featured in the Houston Chronicle in 2005. By the time that wonderful story went to press we had already improved. We are not the same organization that was featured on Geraldo At Large. We learned more and found better ways to work with the people. When People Magazine ran several stories about Paper Houses and presented us with their "Heroes Among Us" award, we were still evolving. This is a never-ending process. Every day we learn more, situations change, and we adapt.

Sharing what we learn is the natural 'next step' to learning. Not only can we help other charities by sharing information, we also share up to date unbiased information about what we see in the border cities. Most Americans are surprised when we tell them that we've never seen or heard of any violence towards Americans in Acuña, Mexico. This city of over 200,000 people sits right on the edge of Mexico, opposite Del Rio, Texas. There are no gun-fights in the streets. There are no reports of violence against American visitors.

We provide monthly support to shelters for children, drug rehab, migrant shelter, and special programs.

Work with the Mexican people to initiate and complete projects that meet an emergency need.

We are working to help a group of Mexican families with a member that is diagnosed with Down syndrome to form their own organization and bring the resources of their own community to provide help to these families.

We partner with other charities and are fortunate to depend upon Giving Hope Worldwide, Dreams, and the Park Foundation when situations arise that is beyond our ability to completely address. Giving Hope Worldwide repaid us for the cost of feeding over a thousand children and paid for the construction of two school cafeterias. This organization also steps in when we need help to pay for large medical bills, such as cancer treatments. The Dreams foundation quickly assumed all responsibility for a little four year old suffering from progeria, the child aging disease.

We encourage others to form nonprofit organizations. We work to establish relationships between U.S. schools and schools in the colonias.

Nuts and Bolts

People send donations directly to our bank were the checks are processed and copies of the checks and deposit information is mailed to us. We record the information and mail receipts.

Shelters

We inspect the shelters, question neighbors, clergy, and business people and spend a lot of time with the children at the shelters. We provide \$1,000 every month to each shelter and the shelters provide us with copies of their expenses and their income (if any). We visit the shelters without notice and also ask questions about the shelter in the neighborhood.

When a medical expense or a need for new equipment (washer, refrigerator) is needed, we usually pay those expenses. We've also paid for repairs to equipment, plumbing and buildings.

Sometimes we will seek a sponsor to provide a large ticket item, like a truck that was donated to the Esperanza Children's Shelter by Mr. and Mrs. Diaz of Houston, Texas.

Drug-Rehabilitation Program

When originally asked to provide help, we invited a half-dozen law enforcement officers from the U.S.A. to visit the facility and to give their advice. After meeting the people in the program and those managing the program, the officers enthusiastically recommended that Paper Houses Across the Border provide help.

Our next step was to implement the same process used when sponsoring a shelter and to require the same periodic reports.

Medical Assistance

Many of the children we help are referred by teachers at the local schools. We have a strong relationship with the doctors at the private hospital in Acuña and these doctors review any existing medical record and examine the people we help. The doctors help us to evaluate the level of care that may already be available at a public hospital without cost. Some people are then sent to the public hospital. We also verify employment and insurance information and we talk with people in the neighborhood.

Why do we talk with people in the neighborhood when someone asks for medical help?

Some parents are alcoholics and drug addicts and we need to handle those situations differently. It is also possible (although we've not seen it) that people could receive help from multiple charities and pocket the difference. In short, we do this because we want to be good stewards as we try to use donations in the best possible way.

Emergency Situations

Although we usually complete our inquiries about the need for medical care within a day, sometimes there are situations that require immediate help. When presented with an emergency situation we immediately provide the emergency medical care that is needed.

The Contract

Medical assistance often involves bus tickets to Monterrey's large hospitals, chemotherapy, surgery, physical therapy and medicine. We enter into a 90-day contract with the family so that everyone understands their role in resolving the medical problem. The parents are always the primary people

responsible for their children. We agree to help with specific medical and medical related costs for 90-days. The parents agree to keep all medical appointments, provide medical reports and receipts to Paper Houses Across the Border and to provide the doctor's plan of action to Paper Houses Across the Border. The parents also agree to follow all of the doctor's instructions regarding in-home care.

At the end of the 90-days, we meet to evaluate the situation and if we can renew our commitment.

Experience has taught us that with a written document, the parents are very careful to provide receipts and medical reports. They are also more likely to perform any follow up physical therapy, such as massaging a leg after surgery and forcing their child to try to use the leg. In the past, some parents stopped the physical therapy because it made the child cry. Without the follow up therapy, the child will often not regain full use of a limb – the contract seems to push the parents that need a little push. (We sometimes meet with parents at the local school and discuss the physical therapy. The teacher read the contract and medical reports and their 'authority' and the respect that people have for the teachers is very helpful.

Door to Door and One Time Help

Our best source of information and understanding is our door to door visits in the colonias. We typically bring a bag of groceries to each home we visit. Often, this food is the difference between parents eating or skipping meals during the month. We discover needs during some of these visits, such as a sick child, a need for a wheel chair or needs of the elderly. Many times families have said, "We did not want to ask. You already help at the cafeterias and you came with this food. We did not want to tell you about this other situation because you already do so much." These are the kind of people we love to help.

On occasions we provide help to shelters beyond those that receive our monthly support. Sometimes we visit other border towns and provide help. In those instances we are more likely to provide help in the form of food, a washing machine or plumbing/building supplies.

Education

We provide books and other school supplies to various schools. We've also provided computer equipment, building repairs and helped families build classrooms for children with special needs.

The government does not provide classrooms at local schools for children with special needs. However, if a classroom is built, the government will provide a special education teacher and a psychologist. The parents at the schools hold fundraisers and actually build these classrooms. We provide some building material to help these parents as they lay the brick.

