

Linaca Village Update February/March 2008



Not so divine Sparks

FLAMES THAT NEED TO DIE



Last month we talked about fanning the divine spark that we see in the children of Honduras. This month we turn our attention to sparks that are causing a lot of damage for the children and the environment in all of Honduras.

For a long time now we have discussed our desires to help in the fight against the deforestation of Honduras. In Linaca alone there are over 500 homes. Nearly 100% of those homes use a wood burning stove, called a **fogon**, to cook their food and heat water for bathing. *Above the smoke is so thick from the kitchen stove that the house is obscured.*

...This insatiable need for wood affects families in other ways as well. Many children are kept out of school to go foraging for firewood... It can take a whole day for a small child to gather enough wood to meet the family's daily needs... Each day we see hoards of children missing school to cart heavy loads of wood on their small shoulders.

The young boy, *pictured above*, is carrying the amount of wood a typical family would need per day to cook their beans. But this, we were told, is not enough for cooking *and* bathing. That would require even more.

Multiply his load times the 500 homes in our area of the Linaca Valley, and that times 365 days a year and you begin to see the problem. Now, think of an entire country and its millions of citizens who rely on wood as their only source of cooking and heating and your head begins to swim.

Water sources in Linaca are drying up. Desert plants encroach, making their debuts on the deforested lands surrounding the area. If deforestation continues at this rate there will be no Linaca in ten years because there will be no water. On top of this consumption of wood comes an increase in health and breathing problems in children. In most houses, smoke belching from the stoves is so thick you can hardly breathe. (See a video of this at www.wrgnews.com.) Lungs burn and eyes tear. At night the carbon blanketing the walls sloughs off bacteria laden and carcinogenic molecules that the family inhales all night.

We did not need to be convinced of the need for alternative ways to heat food or water. You understand the need each time you look down any street of Linaca and find someone stooped under the weight of a load of wood. But when these flames begin to touch our kids with serious health problems, it brings the situation into painfully sharp focus. Year round in Linaca, we see the children at our center with runny noses, infections, and coughs.

Pictured below on the left is a healthy Idalma Sosa in November of 2007 with another of our teen leaders, Cindi. In contrast to many of our children, Idalma comes from an integrated family, living with her mother, father, and siblings.

Idalma has always been a superior student and enthusiastic volunteer at the center. Instead of coming to the center her assigned three days a

week, Idalma is there every day. When she is not sharpening her computer or sewing skills, practicing with our newly formed folkloric dance team, or doing homework, she helps mentor the younger children in the center.

Idalma is a quietly dignified young lady. Thoughtful, poised, and kind. Trustworthy and hardworking. She is the kind of young woman we would like all our children to emulate.

In December when school was out and things were winding down at the center many of our young people went to work in the coffee, tomato, or bean fields to earn money for Christmas. Only the children who were malnourished showed up each day for the nutrition program. But it was not like Idalma not to show up just to hang out with the teachers and the children. After a few days our teachers stopped by Idalma's house to find out where she had been keeping herself.

Idalma appeared gravely ill. She struggled for breath. On top of suffering from asthma (in part due to the smoke that pours through the ceiling from the fogon in the family's kitchen), Idalma had contracted pneumonia and bronchitis.

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FLAMES THAT NEED TO DIE *continued*

Her petite frame lost over 8 pounds in a very short period of time. Had our teachers not shown up at her door and insisted on taking her to the hospital immediately, doctors said one of our most precious children probably would have died.

A month later when Jose and I returned to Honduras, Idalma was still in bed. We delivered four more boxes of medicines prescribed for her. Very pale and weak, Idalma had no energy to move. Smoke billowed into her room and lay like a blanket on the bed where Idalma rested alongside her newborn nephew. On top of the fact that these children are being exposed to carcinogens and suffer numerous lung complications, most families cannot afford medicines required to treat their symptoms. Idalma's family is no exception. Without our center, she would have been on her own.

This insatiable need for wood affects families in other ways as well. Many children are kept out of school to go foraging for firewood every day. It is becoming more difficult to find timber to burn because of laws in place that prohibit cutting of live wood - although this is often ignored. It can take a whole day for a small child to gather enough wood to meet the family's daily needs. Each day we see hoards of children missing school to cart heavy loads of wood on their small shoulders.

One answer to all the problems caused by the fogons can be found in a new technology that turns wood burning ovens into a far more eco friendly device. The eco-fogon (one model is pictured to the right) is a highly efficient oven that uses a fraction of the fuel consumed by regular fogons. Our teens, including Idalma, served a lunch for about 30 people from this eco fogon in just a few minutes.

The eco fogon can burn sugar cane and corn husks among other things. There is far less smoke and it is exhausted away from the home. Carcinogenic molecules are not accumulating on the walls and ceilings. Children have to spend a fraction of their time hunting for wood. More trees that protect the water source are spared.

All in all the eco fogon is a Godsend for this problem. Each fogon will cost us nearly \$100 to install. We have received a generous grant from a church in Boston to install these ovens in 120 homes in Linaca.



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KEEPING OUR KIDS IN SCHOOL



While there are so many positives happening each day, the specter of poverty and its ravages continue to haunt us at every turn. Our challenges are more than cut out for us.

Fatima and Isback, *pictured above*, understand that the need to fund our teens' higher education is one of the biggest challenges we face today. Without us they would not be in school this year. All those sweet little baby faces we signed up at the center four years ago are maturing and growing faster than you can imagine. (See the website for some before and after pictures.)

The cost for a Linacan child to go to school is prohibitive for most of our teens. Bus fare alone is over \$30 a month. Add to that uniforms, matriculation, food, and books, and you

understand that a \$28 monthly sponsorship will not go far. Parents of these children make around \$30 - \$50 a month in most homes.

We have begun a higher education fund for all the teen leaders in the center who would like to continue their education. These teens volunteer with us mentoring the younger children in the center. They will also be helping us branch into surrounding communities.

Not one of the girls that have remained faithful attendees of our center has gotten pregnant. However, last trip we were heartbroken to hear about two adorable young teen girls who infrequently attended our center in their younger years. Both had since dropped out of public school and stopped attending the center.

Both girls became pregnant by strangers they met on a one night escape from the doldrums of Linaca. At the tender age of 15 these girls have all but guaranteed themselves and their babies a future without hope.

While those teens refused the help offered over the years, last month we rescued over 50 teens and children whose parents condemned them to work in the bean fields or foraging for wood instead of entering school.

For the lack of a pair of shoes or a few supplies children were being doomed to a life of poverty. In some cases it took a great deal of work and cajoling to get the parents to release their children to school and our center. One such example is 10-year-old Flora, *pictured here*, on her first day at the center.

We have spoken of Flora many times since the day we met her a few months ago. Flushed from making tortillas in the hot kitchen, Flora had never heard of our center or been to school a day in her life. That very day Flora attended our center for the first time and was enrolled in our nutrition plan. She was also tutored in reading and writing.

Visiting her house many times over the past few months, we discussed with Flora's mother the importance of her attending school. Just before school started we were told that Flora's mother preferred that Flora stay home so she could collect wood for the fogon and make tortillas for the large extended family. It was no easy feat to convince Flora's mother to let her attend school. But we persevered until she said yes.

We provided Flora with a complete uniform, shoes, backpack, and all supplies to enter school. She could not stop smiling that day. We pray for a bright future for girls like Flora.



CRIME AND DRUGS AFFECTING OUR CHILDREN AND OUR SAFETY



In our January update we told you about the drug problem that has manifested in a dramatic way over the past year in the sleepy little village of Linaca.

Our teens tell us that they have all been offered drugs recently.

Each day at our center our teens gather together with center mentors for a teaching and interactive talk on values, morality, and spiritual guidance. Well over 50 teens are active participants in these discussions during the course of the week.

Soon, at the request of the public schools, these teens will be taking what they have learned to the elementary school. Instructing the younger children about the dangers of drugs, sex, and consequences of dropping out of school will be the focus of their discussions.

While Honduras is a very dangerous place over all, Linaca has not been affected much by serious crime. However that changed last Sunday. Two of our teen leaders, Tavo and Oscar, *pictured here*, were waiting for a bus at 8:30 in the morning. Suddenly grabbed from behind, they felt sharp knives poised at their jugular veins. Young thieves looking for drug money, threatened their lives demanding everything they had, down to their new school backpacks and shoes.

A generous benefactor recently outfitted Oscar for school providing him with tuition, bus money, and new clothes and supplies for the school year. Tavo's supplies were donated from our center's Poorest of the Poor Fund. A fund we use for special needs of any of our students. If you wish to donate to this fund, know that this, as all donations to the center will be applied 100% to the children's needs.

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Those to receive the first eco fogons are the families who are faithful in sending their children to school and to our center.

As the people in the community see the benefits of these ovens, we feel that they too will begin to insist their children attend school so that they may profit from this technology.

Teens from our center, like the group pictured here, will install the fogons as a service project to the community. Each family receiving a stove will be required to invest labor, materials, or volunteer in some way at the Children's Center.

Down the road, we are planning to build a workshop at our center so that we can construct the fogons in Linaca. This will allow some of our teens to gain practical job skills. The profits from each oven sold will go to a scholarship fund helping secure their higher education in the future.



HOPES AND DREAMS FOR 2008

- Ø Funding for expansion into surrounding communities in partnership with other educational foundations
 - Ø Truck or van for expansion and transportation of students and teachers
 - Ø Funding for expansion of eco fogons into 400 homes in Linaca
 - Ø Funding for scholarships for teens to continue into higher education
- Ø Village sponsors for Linaca and surrounding villages at \$30 per month - 100% goes to Honduras
 - Ø General funds to continue traveling to Honduras for several weeks each month

WEB UPDATES

Please take the time to check out our new website at www.wrgnews.com. There are many new features there, slide shows, and videos that show every day life in the places we live and work in Honduras.

If you have friends to share our Linaca family with please pass this newsletter and link on to them. Please send us your recent email address.

We created a video for a group of friends in Atlanta who are part of our Linaca family. It can be seen in four parts on You Tube. The video is called *Linaca Children's Center*. Or write to us and we will send you a the DVD.