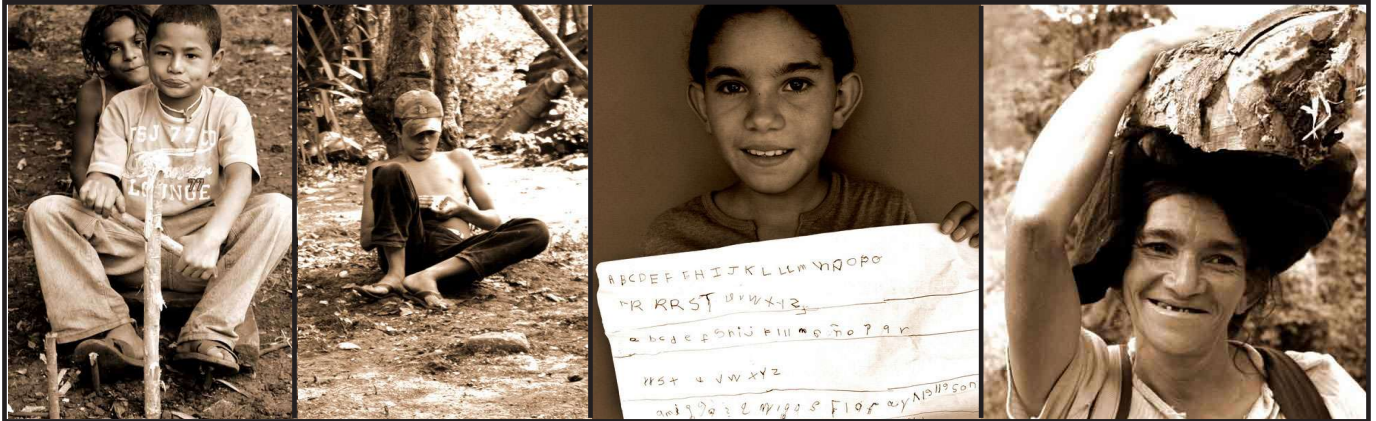


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# Linaca Village Update January 2008



*Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.*

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## FANNING THE DIVINE SPARK

The little boy in the picture *above left* is oblivious to the misery around him. His adobe house is near collapse. The outdoor latrine, with its cover ripped away, is beyond repair. There is little more than a few tortillas and beans to feed his family of eight.

Until that day when we brought the family blankets, he had to sleep in all the clothing he owned, which is not much, just to keep warm.

Instead of the despair most see when looking at his situation, Luis is full of joy. From a broken ladder, with sticks for a steering wheel, clutch, and gear shift, his magic bus rolls on fueled by a divine spark of creativity and the *pbfffffffffffff* of his lips as he motors down his imaginary road. No need for brakes, he insists, "The bus will stop when it runs out of gas!"

The little girl in the picture *third from left above* proudly displays her first ever attempt at writing. Discovered at the age of ten by our center's staff on their community rounds, Flora was malnourished and had never been to school.

*In the past year, major drug cartels have moved in and set up camps all over Honduras. Every day groups of feckless teens wander down the streets of Linaca openly smoking marijuana. No one does a thing about it.*

She is now flourishing in our center, fed a nutritious lunch, vitamins, and learning to read and write. This year Flora will enter public school for the first time in her life.

Over the years we have visited and worked in Linaca, we have watched children who began like Luis, end up like the shiftless young man in the picture next to him.

Our hearts have broken over little girls like Flora that end up like her mother pictured next to her. Illiterate. Toothless. A passel of children from different fathers. Carrying a load of wood instead of books and homework.

The divine spark we see in the children above, their innocence, hope, and creativity, if not nurtured will be snuffed out.

The teen shuffling cards and Flora's mother were given no vision for a future. They were condemned to life in the fields, picking beans, for a couple of dollars a day or hunting for wood.

Mothers, in most families, cannot work as they are too consumed with raising babies, one after hopeless one.

It is our team's calling to inspire and instill a much higher vision in the children and the parents we serve.

Each year we do a census of the 500 households that comprise over 6,000 people living in the Linaca valley. From these visits we see how our children live.

We spend time educating the parents as to the importance of sending their children to school and to our center. We help those we can with special needs - such as Luis's family above, who will soon get a new and enclosed latrine.

Over the past few years of census taking when we asked the parents what is the biggest problem they see facing the community their answers were consistent, ranging from lack of employment to underage drinking.

From 2007 to 2008 the same parents' answers to this question dramatically changed. The vast majority of the respondents said drugs are their biggest concern.

Today the shacks of little Linaca, that eight years ago had no electricity, still have no food on the shelves, many lack toilets, and running water, but most have a television with cable and free pornography channels, cell phones, and easy access to marijuana.

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As divine sparks of creativity are snuffed out, their appetites to escape misery grow. As opportunities to work shrink, crime and flight to U.S. dramatically increases. Desperate for anything to pawn, innocent people are shot dead in the street for a piece of jewelry or a cheap cell phone.

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## A CALLING VS. A JOB

Irma, a top-notch teacher at our center and director of education, is bright, capable, qualified, and sought out by many teaching institutions in Danli where she lives. No matter the weather, Irma rides the unpaved roads to Linaca every day on the back of a motorcycle with another new center instructor, Hector, because she feels called to the work. She is a master at fanning the divine spark in our children like Bairon pictured right.

Abandoned by both of his parents, Bairon brought out the protective instincts of Irma like a mother hen. Recognizing that spark of potential (and the pain) in this young man, she immediately took him under her protective wing. On his birthday she bought him a new shirt and had a cake for him to celebrate the day with his friends. Though he lives in Linaca, Bairon often finds excuses to go to Danli just to drop in on Irma's family. On holidays, Bairon goes to Irma's home where he is treated like a son by her husband and children.

Last Saturday our doorbell rang during a training session we were having with our center teachers/mentors in Danli. Outside a man no one knew was asking for Professor Irma. It turned out the man was an ice cream vendor sent by Bairon who is working construction across the street from us over the school break.

Knowing that Irma was in a training session, Bairon had flagged down the ice cream man and sent him over to give Irma a treat. That ice cream bar likely amounted to a quarter of his pay that day. With the dregs of humanity, Bairon toils away under difficult and dangerous situations to earn a couple of dollars a day.

A few days earlier Irma asked Bairon what kept him from doing drugs and dropping out of school like all the young men he was working with now. He told her honestly that he would have been just like them. As a matter of fact, that was the road he was headed down when he learned about our center and began attending.

It was the genuine care Irma and the other center mentors and leaders showered on him that kept Bairon coming back. He told her point blank that the only reason he did not do drugs is because she is the first person who really cared about him, just like he imagined a mother would care for a son. Initially he stayed away from drugs and alcohol because he did not want to disappoint her. In the meantime, through the teaching he has received at our

center, Bairon learned self respect, gained vision for a better life, and a love for God that he also wanted to please. He is now one of our future leaders in training.

A few days before Bairon told Irma about his feelings, the Catholic University in town offered her a job with a higher salary and free tuition to its school for all three of her children! She turned it down, choosing to remain with Linaca's children and teens like Bairon.



From the first time we explained our philosophy to her, Irma felt called to work with us and the children of Linaca. But it wasn't until Bairon's revelation of the impact she has had on his life that she sensed a strong confirmation of her calling. The reward of that moment was far more than she could earn at the Catholic University. She and all our teachers know that they are making this kind of difference in hundreds of children's lives. They are eager to move their sphere of influence into surrounding villages in 2008.

## SPARKS THAT TURN INTO FLAMES

We recently made a DVD of the children's center for an event in Atlanta. Interviewed in it is that special little twelve-year-old, Leda Avila, who we have been reporting on since day one of sign ups at our children's center nearly four years ago. The once malnourished, lice ridden, all-but-abandoned street urchin who never learned to read or write until she entered our center, has recently tested as the brightest child in her school. Below are two pictures of Leda before and during her metamorphosis, and two recent shots. What a difference!



Until recently, Leda never understood that her sponsor from the United States also had a rough beginning in life. Coming from an honorable, but poor family, he worked hard to earn his own way through college and now enjoys a successful career, home, and family. His vision is the vision we have for our children; don't let hardships overcome you, use hardships as a driving force to overcome any barriers to success in life. Recently, Leda's sponsor wrote her a letter explaining his humble beginnings and fanned the sparks to set her vision higher.

Leda, who has always had an enormously generous heart, is so inspired by the love and care she has received from our teachers and her sponsor that she wants to dedicate her life to helping the poor. And she is far from alone among our teens.

In the DVD several of our teens talk about what the center has meant to them. Even young men talked candidly about the love and personal attention they get from the teachers as a driving force that keeps them coming back to the center. Several of our teen girls suffered from depression and despondency so severe they considered taking their lives. Suicides are common in Linaca. These young women, who felt so alone and isolated in their homes, realized that they had a place to go with their troubles. They could make the choice not to be alone in their angst. Each went

to our center's mentors (pictured below with mentor-in-training Leda) and ultimately found the help they needed to get through their crises without succumbing to the bad examples all around them of how to cope with or end their problems.

The year 2007 was a huge success. We opened our new center, our work in concert with the public schools rose to a new level, our attendance was up with double the amount of children keeping regular schedules, our nutrition program also doubled, we hired new teachers/mentors for the center, public school teachers reported children who attended our center were doing better in their studies, we gained new teen volunteers, we were given a grant for the installation of 100 eco friendly ovens that cut wood consumption and reduce disease, and, finally, we made connections that give us the hope of acquiring a state of the art library for Linaca!

The divine spark in the children of Honduras is in real danger of being snuffed out by lack of role models, ignorance, lack of parental love and care, lack of education, disease, malnutrition, and so many things that plague poorest of the poor. We are so grateful for all of you who partner with us to fan the divine sparks in the Bairons and the Ledas. Your help is truly changing a village of precious lives.

## HOPES AND DREAMS FOR 2008

- \* Expansion into surrounding communities in partnership with other educational foundations
- \* Truck or van for transportation of students and teachers into surrounding communities
- \* Scholarships for teens to continue higher education
- \* Village sponsors for Linaca and surrounding villages
- \* Expansion of eco oven program into 400 more homes in Linaca

Please contact Chip Reames at [chip.reames@atlcap.com](mailto:chip.reames@atlcap.com) for more information about our needs, or Nelle Smith at the address below.

