



FUNDACION RUACH

Fundacion Cristiana Comunitaria para Personas con Discapacidad

8th Ruach Newsletter (Aug 2019): Three years on!

With every new Quarterly Newsletter our readership is a changing readership, because new QNL recipients join up who are less familiar with Ruach's story so far. On 29 August we celebrate the 3rd birthday of our community home, a good time to reflect on what we have achieved since we got established as a legal entity in Dec 2015 as the Fundacion Cristiana Comunitaria para personas con discapacidad Ruach, or the Ruach Foundation for short. As we look ahead to future plans, and reflect on what has been, we feel very grateful for the support of people near and far without whom we could not have managed. Together we have made a difference for intellectually disabled adults here in Nicaragua.

What we work for!

Our aim is to work towards providing people having an intellectual disability with 'a better place to be' in the society, and to contribute to protecting their rights as human beings. We do this by running a community home (protection), an activities club (stimulation), and by a host of awareness raising activities. The coordinator of the home and club trains the mostly inexperienced employees and ensures that what home and club offer is in line with the needs of the residents and club participants (education). Ruach is unique in Nicaragua.

The Ruach Foundation is governed by a board. 50% of the funding comes from the Dutch mother foundation Vivir Juntos, the other 50% needs to be raised by Ruach themselves, which is quite a challenge for a young organization in a very poor country. Soon Ruach will present a plan to start a spectacles shop which we hope will start generating an income through which we can strengthen our social work. In the meantime we will still rely on donor funding to make ends meet.

How we work: our philosophy in day-to-day life

We are deeply inspired by L'Arche, the worldwide organization of Ark communities founded by Jean Vanier who passed away in May this year (see our 7th Quarterly Newsletter). This means that in our Ruach community 6 people with a disability live together with 2 without a disability in an atmosphere of mutual respect, appreciation of each other's talents and complementarity. Ruach is not yet a full member of the International Foundation of Ark Communities, but has got the status of a 'friend'. In the next 2 years before our status is re-assessed we

will strive to meet the conditions for full membership.

We certainly live and work already in the spirit of the Ark. Our staff meeting at the *start of every day* begins with a reflection prepared by staff who take it in turns. This can take the form of a bible text, a poem, or some interesting news of the day. *At the end the day* staff **and** residents meet for another reflection, this time with a greater emphasis on prayer and singing together. We also have *quarterly retreats* for staff and members of the board which are always lead by a priest or church minister. Our staff much appreciates these opportunities to reflect.



Staff of Ruach's community home (from left to right: Marys, Scarlet, Mayra (kitchen/cleaning), Astrid, Carmen and Ana (living-in))

The community home

The community home started in Aug 2016 with 4 members: brother and sister Daniel and Loyda, and Jonathan and his mother Astrid Delleman who is the coordinator of the Ruach home and activities club. In December 2018 another brother and sister, Manuel and Maria Helena, became the 7th and 8th resident of our community, having moved from an isolated

part of San Carlos, a day's journey away from Juigalpa. Our house is now filled to capacity, which has given us a certain degree of stability and homeliness which we hope to maintain. Over the 3 years there have been several staff changes. Because of a change in work rota recommended by an external evaluator, an extra home care assistant, Scarlet, was recently recruited. We now have a team that shows good team spirit and a high degree of affinity with the residents. This shows in the quality of the work. The fact that Carmen wanted to celebrate her 2 years' working in the community home is a good sign. We had a simple, warm celebration.

The activities club

Progress at the activities club has been slow. New participants joined but others left for various reasons. The main reason is that families find it hard to get their family member to the club and back. On average we had 6 to 12 participants per week, in different groups. One of the home care assistants also works in the club for two afternoons per week in order to bring the salary costs down as we have to run the activities club on a minimal budget for the time being. However we do not cut down on the quality of work at the club. The describing of the club's methodology was improved. The approach is to work development-oriented with specific targets set for each participant and a six-monthly evaluation with a member of the participant's family.

Ruach's increased visibility and education

Before Ruach got legal status at the end of 2015 we were 'just' a group of well-intentioned individuals (a reflection group) with a dream to improve the lives of intellectually disabled adults who in our society are kept out of the public eye. 3 years on much has improved:

(i) we have a network of about 10 'godparents' contributing to the Foundation, with free transport, free haircuts for the residents, donations of food, second-hand clothing, free access to a swimming pool or reduced medical fees, e.g when Loyda needed emergency dental treatment.



(ii) we have created a working relationship with the local government and one university;

(iii) we have had a series of interns from different

countries who lived and worked with us for 1-2 months and were able to contribute and also benefit from their stay;

(iv) in general, the fact that our residents and club participants are more regularly seen in public places is altering the society's perception of intellectually disabled adults. A moving example was when participants of the activities centre spent a week producing piñatas in a book shop in Juigalpa as shown in the picture below.



(v) we are actively involved in the community, always ready to promote our work through meetings with youth- and church groups or participation in meetings with social sector professionals.

(vi) our coordinator has taught part-time at two universities, earning no money, but other benefits for Ruach.

Our public relations and fund raising

Three years ago we were strongly dependent on our mother foundation Vivir Juntos in the Netherlands, both for publicity and fund raising.

(i) Promotion video and radio broadcasting:

Through the University where our coordinator taught for six months and their link with the local television station, the television station produced a Spanish promotion video about Ruach's work. The owner of the television station regularly broadcasts the video on his television station. And even better, he also offered Ruach a 15 minute slot every Friday for us to talk about our work. Of course we took up this offer with great enthusiasm, and the president of the Board and the coordinator of the Ruach Home and Club take it in turns. It is a great step towards increased visibility and goodwill within our local context.

(ii) Facebook and website: we now have a Facebook page for the Ruach Foundation which is regularly maintained by volunteers. In January this year we employed someone to set up our own Spanish website www.fundacionruach.org to help us improve the publicity about our work. Since March we have had a volunteer who maintains the site.

(iii) Superstar status within Global Giving:

Ruach is a vetted member of Global Giving, an

international organization that supports charities across the world to learn about (crowd) fund-raising. We regularly send reports about our work to Global Giving and this has become an important way for us to stay in touch with our friends and donors in especially the US and the UK to thank them for their support, irrespective of the size of the gift. We are proud that our regular participation in GG's learning programme has earned us Superstar status within Global Giving!

RECENT NEWS FLASHES

🚩 MOTHER'S DAY AND FAMILY VISITS

The Ruach Home operates as a family. So we make a special effort to celebrate days such as Mother's Day in the same way as do most Nicaraguan families. Here is a picture of our Mother's Day celebration at Ruach on 30th May, when we celebrated with the three mothers and an aunt of our 6 residents (the mother of Manuel and Maria passed away). Astrid's son Jonathan is the only one not in the picture.



Our residents benefit from routine and a stable and secure place to be, and therefore we encourage relatives of our residents to visit us rather than our residents going back on frequent visits to their original homes. However it is important for us that links between our residents and their other family is maintained as best as possible. So last month we made exceptions to the 'rule' and our coordinator made two trips. She took Miguel to visit his 80 year old mother at her home as the mother would struggle to visit us due to problems of mobility and transport.

Astrid also accompanied Manuel and Maria Helena on a visit to their aunt who lives 'only' an hour away (unlike their father who cannot visit Ruach often because he lives a long day's journey away). Both visits were happy and connecting occasions.

🚩 NICARAGUA UPDATE

We live in a country where violation of human rights has been a major issue since April 2018. People do not speak out for fear of repercussions. The Government seems to have lost 'heart for the people' and easily puts opponents in jail. The

political crisis has exacerbated the economic conditions, which hit the most vulnerable people hardest.

It affects Ruach too. Given Nicaragua's current reputation and the responsibility Ruach carries for our guests, we cannot actively recruit international volunteers, nor encourage visits from abroad. Tourism to Nicaragua has greatly declined over the past year. In our work we feel the consequences of this in many areas.

🚩 Support Eric Jager's 3rd run for Ruach

Eric will be 'on the run' for Ruach again on the 14th of September in his home town Winschoten in the Netherlands. He will participate in a 50 km road race to raise funds for Ruach. (He will also match these funds, from another source completely, for The Hidden Needs Trust, an English charity which works for children with special education needs in Dorset. Eric writes: *"I do this run because I whole-heartedly support Ruach's and my dream is to build up a circle of 'Friends of Ruach' who would like to receive regular updates about the progress of Ruach's work, and who would be willing to make a small donation, preferably recurrently, as a sign of solidarity and support for Ruach's own efforts to gain a higher degree of financial independence"*.



Eric in the Dorset hills during his 2nd Ruach run in 2018

You can sponsor Eric via Ruach's page on the Global Giving website at the following link:

<https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/fundacionruach>

🚩 How you can also help Ruach?

We believe that our work is helped by more and more people knowing that we exist and what we try to do. Another great gift you could make to Ruach is therefore to sign up for the quarterly newsletter (if not already done so) or to **share this Newsletter with friends and/or family**. Please send an email to ruachjuigalpa@gmail.com if you or anyone in your circle would like to receive our next Newsletter due in November 2019.