



# FUNDACION RUACH

Fundacion Cristiana Comunitaria para Personas con Discapacidad

## 10<sup>th</sup> Ruach Newsletter (February 2020): Family relations of Ruach's core members

In this 10<sup>th</sup> Newsletter our main theme is the relationship between our permanent residents (whom we'd like to call our 'core members') and the members of their original family, in particular parents and siblings. We also will tell you something about our plans to start an optician's shop as a way to increase our financial independence. As usual, we will update you on the social and political situation in Nicaragua.

### Our core members and their original families

When core members first join us, a contract is signed in which a member of the original family, usually a parent, requests the Ruach Foundation to help care for their child. However, the legal responsibility remains with the parent. The contract also stipulates that the parent will voluntarily contribute towards their child's care according to their means, usually by contributions in kind, e.g. rice and beans. We actively encourage the family to keep in touch with their family member, but we are only partly successful in this respect. The Ruach Community currently has six core members, of whom four are two brother-sister duos: Loyda and Daniel, and Maria Elena and Manuel. Then we have Miguel and Jonathan.

### **Jonathan's family**

Jonathan is the son of Astrid Delleman, Ruach's coordinator, and he is fortunate that his mother also lives in the community. Jonathan and his sister Daniella, who lives in Ecuador, are very close. Astrid and Jonathan visit Daniella every year, as face to face contact with his sister is crucial for Jonathan who cannot communicate via telephone or Skype. Jonathan should count himself lucky, as none of Ruach's other core members have noticeably meaningful contact with any of their siblings.



### **Challenges of keeping up the contact**

All other core members besides Jonathan came to Ruach because the only surviving parent could no longer cope with the demands and responsibilities of caring for their intellectually disabled child due to ill-health or the wife's death. And these same demands make it understandable that none of the siblings of Daniel, Loyda, Maria Elena, Manuel or Miguel could provide an alternative home for them. There are virtually no other alternatives in Nicaragua for people in our core members' situation. Without Ruach, our current core members would have had to stay in their old homes with a reduced quality of care and increased chances of neglect. We feel powerless sometimes. At a deeper level it is difficult to understand why, in a country like Nicaragua where society so much values family connections, people who are among the most vulnerable fall between the cracks.

### **Loyda and Daniel's family**

Loyda and Daniel get visits twice a month from a sister, but she mainly comes to accompany their mother who is old and sickly. But they never see or hear anything from their other four siblings



### **Miguel's family**

Miguel's case is even sadder. His mother is an octogenarian; she cannot walk properly. She loves Miguel and is well-intentioned, but sadly is hardly able to visit Miguel on her own anymore. We have not seen or even heard anything from any of

Miguel's three sisters, although one of them owns a vehicle. One of Miguel's brothers-in-law was appointed as Miguel's legal representative, and he initially visited Miguel regularly, but in the past year he has lost touch in spite of our phone calls to make him more active. The main contact Miguel now has with his family is a little parcel that his mother sends every month as a contribution to his upkeep at Ruach. Fortunately, Miguel seems to be enjoying being at our home. He often uses the word 'mama', but so far it is not clear to us what emotional content the word has for Miguel. He appreciates the help and attention that our staff give him and loves getting a cuddle.

### **Maria Elena en Manuel's family**

Napoleon, the father of Maria Elena and Manuel, lives in an isolated place a long-day's journey away. Telephone connections to Juigalpa are poor, so the amount of contact he has had with his children since they joined us is less than what he and we would have hoped. Part of the problem of living so far away is that the father is in a different world which makes it hard for him to imagine how much pleasure a simple telephone call would give to his children, especially for Manuel who functions at a higher level, and is more aware of the recent death of his mother and lack of contact with his father. And none of their siblings have been in touch.

### **A father-of-'good will'**

Recently the father sent a message that he wanted to visit Ruach, so I suggested a Wednesday, our special day for a trip to the swimming pool, for him to be able to watch his children's newly acquired skills! I decided not to mention the planned visit to Manuel and Maria Elena to prevent disappointment if something were to crop up to stop the father from coming.

But Napoleon made it! He arrived loaded with home grown cooking bananas, fruit and vegetables. And moreover, in time to join us to the pool together with a half-brother and half-sister of Manuel and Maria Elena. Maria Elena was immediately happy when she saw her father, but Manuel needed time for the ice to break. But after a while he started to enjoy his father's visit. Napoleon was very vocal about his pleasure to see his children's progress in the water, and his children were beaming with pride.

It was the right context to work with Napoleon to get Maria Elena and Manuel registered as Nicaraguan citizens.

### **"To be or not to be?; that's (still) the question"**

Unlike her younger brother, Maria Elena was registered at birth 26 years ago, but her parents did not start a procedure to apply for an identity card when she turned 16. An identity card is a 'must' in Nicaragua to prove that you exist and to get access to all sorts of services, including health and education.



It's relatively easy for Maria Elena to apply for an identity card as she has already got a birth certificate. However, for her brother who has not got one, (a situation very common in Nicaragua), it is difficult. Last August Napoleon and I made enquiries at the Population Register's Office what would be needed to get an identity card for Manuel. We were given a long check list of documents to be handed in as well as the prospect of handing in these documents in person in the capital Managua. Napoleon's courage sank into his boots when he heard this.

This time we tried a different channel, the Election Council. We were helped by a very non-bureaucratic clerk with a practical approach to Napoleon's predicament: "*Not officially married, and 'mother died' equals to 'one-parent family', hence far less paperwork*", and so on. Napoleon was happy as the simplified process seemed 'do-able', and, although not easy, could not have been easier. He promised to return next week with the required paperwork to start the procedures to obtain an identity card for both his children. It would also be a burden off his conscience. So we now put all our energy into reaching a happy ending for Maria Elena and Manuel to become full-fledged Nicaraguan citizens. Let's pray Napoleon keeps up his motivation, and that we are not confronted with unexpected bureaucratic demands in the remaining procedures.

## **The Ruach Community Home**

At our Community Home we try hard to compensate, the best we can, for the lack of involvement of the families of our core members . Time heals some of the wounds fortunately, and at Ruach we offer a range of enjoyable and stimulating activities which soften the pain. If I ever have to explain to outsiders what our community home is all about, I always say: 'We are a somewhat odd family; we give respect to people who in their own society (and in their own homes sometimes) were treated without regard. We make them feel that they belong with us and that we are happy to have them with us.' But we aim higher than 'just' providing a home and a better life for Loyda, Daniel, Maria Elena, Manuel and Miguel. We want to play our part to create a more human society for many more people in their situation.

## **Popular optician's shop**

For us to be able to do more, the Ruach Foundation needs to become financially self-sustaining. We have a concrete plan how to reach this goal. We want to set up an optician's shop by tapping into the expertise we already have within our Foundation. We have to raise the funding needed for starting capital and we are confident we could turn the business into profits in the relatively short time, which we would re-invest into our social work. A summary of the proposal is available in English.

You are kindly invited to (1) help us find potential donors who would like to receive the proposal, (2) request us for a copy of the proposal to help us think through how we can improve and execute the plans. All ideas will be welcome.

## **Nicaragua Update**

Nicaragua no longer makes the headlines, but the country is not doing well. The Government does not tolerate any protests and is losing support by the day. Any attempts by people to demonstrate are met by a large police force to prevent people gathering. The political situation affects the economy: unemployment has increased, prices have gone up and this makes it even harder for the poor to make ends meet. But there is a bit of good news too. The various anti-government movements are working together to form a united front. Also, for the last year the critical newspaper La Prensa was virtually out of business as consignments of printing paper were withheld by customs. Probably due to international pressure the printing paper has now been released by customs and we hope

we'll soon be able to buy a hard-copy newspaper again in a country where a digital internet version does not yet reach many people.

## **New microwave from German class**

Last month we received a donation from a group of friends in Sherborne, UK who study German together. The group meets once a week and has arranged that the money owed to the hostess for coffee and biscuits over a term is used for a charity of the group's choice. Ruach was able to purchase a much-needed new microwave from the proceeds. A super gesture which makes us feel very connected and encouraged. A very BIG Thank You.



We hope of course that their example will inspire you to organize something similar!

We wish all of you a Happy Lent and Easter period. And we hope we'll meet again in May 2020 with our 11<sup>th</sup> Newsletter.

## ***Your involvement means the world to us. Together we can make a difference!***

Every penny we raise will contribute to improve the lives of the people with an intellectual disability in Juigalpa!

Donating is possible via

1. Global Giving (in £, \$): <https://www.globalgiving.org/projects/fundacionruach>, or
2. Vivir Juntos (in €): [www.vivirjuntos.nl](http://www.vivirjuntos.nl)

**Want to know more? Interested in the optical project?**

Write an email to [ruachjuigalpa@gmail.com](mailto:ruachjuigalpa@gmail.com)