

An Oasis of Hope in Challenging Times

How are you doing in these times? I can imagine an array of responses given the multiple scenarios we confront each day. And I know you are a person committed to bringing hope to the world and to peoples and communities most in need. My desire is to show you the hope you are bringing through the actions of Wellspring Karitas Foundation, WKF. We work with people who have many more reasons to feel despair, yet as we allow ourselves to be touched by their stories and open to what they are doing together with us, we discover a wellspring of hope in action.

It is a privilege for me to be part of WKF, as it should be for you, to be witness and inspiration to these incredible people you will read about in a minute. **Every single one of these projects is calling out and pushing forward, growing to exponentially multiply and reach many more people.** I will be direct, the size of this growth, and its impact in the world, is directly related to the financial resources we can collectively generate. I invite you to also consider sharing this opportunity of giving hope with others. Share this newsletter with family, friends and colleagues (we can send you more or I can send a PDF version). Ask them to **consider coming on one of our Learning Delegations, or ask them if they would like to have a conversation with me.**

The world needs help, and each of us needs help; the beautiful thing is that when we care and we give, we get Hope back in multiples.

Erik Friend

Executive Director, Wellspring Karitas

To see stats, numbers, and measurable progress indicators, visit our website: www.karitasfoundation.org

ALEM

Replication, growth and progress

ALEM's most significant endeavor yet has been extending its reach and working to replicate our successful Jazz-My-Chair wheelchair repair model. The need is incalculable and we need to bring ALEM's services to new areas. ALEM has reached maximum capacity with its present structure: a single team of 10 wheelchair bound people, the executive director, Mayra Solano, and the vehicle operator. **ALEM held 24 local Jazz-My-Chair clinics and 12 full week clinics across 6 states of Mexico to repair 3,000 wheelchairs. We want to double this number.** We will need 2 teams or a larger team that can divide up to carry out additional clinics. This is a challenge in terms of human capital and financial resources. **This is where our donors could help us bring hope rolling into a new reality.**



It would be easier for the team and myself, and it would not strain our finances, to simply enjoy success and service at the present level. It is certainly commendable as it is. But when we are out on the road, we see the desperate need for wheelchair repairs, and we see the economic transformation that comes when communities witness People with Disabilities working and performing a vital service for their families and neighbors. They see the potential



for self-sufficiency. There is hope. We feel compelled to replicate this organization across Mexico, if not across Latin America and beyond. **People visit us from all over México, and even from El Salvador and Peru, during our repair clinics begging us to bring the program to their communities.**

Replicating our success means that we have created manuals and training videos for other organizations to independently create their own versions of ALEM - we are available for training. It also means our own expansion, and we have worked on inventory and management software, integrated new people onto the team, and worked on the team's human development and empowerment. We have carried out a dozen repair clinics in Mexico City and have a group of local Rotary Clubs helping coordinate logistics and scheduling. Our team is enthusiastic and takes great pride in helping others with disabilities. With additional financial support, we can add and train staff to bring this life-changing work and hope to more of those in need.

La Estación

Generational renewal and self-sufficiency

La Estación, the community where we have worked for the longest, is a true manifestation of hope in a community with grave scarcity. When we started working in the community 22 years ago, most of the houses were cardboard, box springs and recycled crates; few kids finished middle school and the thought of going to college was unheard of. **Today, it is commonplace for the children to finish high school and their dreams of going to college are happening.** The foundation of the program is the community center, where there is the breakfast program, support of the preschool, and space for numerous workshops from baking to building self-esteem.

A percentage of the expense of the community center is self-generated income through a small fee for the breakfasts and, of course, the volunteer work of the 60 mothers who take turns preparing the 120-150 breakfasts each day. The challenge we have taken on



this year is to make small and continual steps toward greater self-sufficiency. We have hired a facilitator to fortify and empower the local governance team of mothers. After 22 years, it is time for new moms to join in a leadership role. With just two months in it is impossible to talk of concrete results, but what we can see is excitement about growing and innovating. And that is a pretty big deal because pushing out of our comfort zone could just as easily generate resistance and anxiety. **Support from our donor base brings hope to these families to see the real possibilities for a fuller life.**

Education Initiative

Ripple effects and diversification

Moving into its tenth year, **we are building on resounding success. The Education Initiative has almost doubled the adolescents directly supported.** It also is reaching youth beyond that group, as well as offering programming for parents. Both qualitatively and quantitatively, the indicators and the narratives are inspiring. More inspiring is the increase in the number of our graduates who are now in college.

La Jugarreta, the organization that operates our program in Tepoztlán, teaches 21 vibrant, committed adolescents, who are all living in critical situations. La Jugarreta and WKF also started workshops for positive parenting, resulting in a measurable increase in well-being based on surveys. Altogether, the program reaches 49 people directly. Independent of the Education Initiative, La Jugarreta continues



to offer a month long Fun and Games Festival that provides interaction and learning. One Friday this year, they had 900 participants, with 70 volunteers!

In Cuernavaca, with our partner Caminando Unidos, we have been creative. We have put in place agreements with private schools, adapted adult education programs for youth (allowing them to get GED certification), on-line schooling, where possible, and other learning alternatives. **A total of 90 youth receive schooling in a very depressed area of Cuernavaca.**

We have an astounding number of worthy applicants for this program. Increased financial support would bring hope to many more families and greater transformation in their communities.



Resiliente

Growing Accessibility for All



Resiliente continues to do wonders. After some significant logistical struggles with the prior location, we were able to help them move their restaurant, which is staffed by the hearing-impaired and intellectually challenged. The new space is close by in downtown Cuernavaca, now with a complete kitchen (no more carrying water in) and has an outdoor garden. ALEM staff donated an elevator, so that customers in wheelchairs can enjoy the experience – a beautiful example of community support. The new restaurant has been a total success with a huge increase in clientele.

The success of the restaurant has allowed Resiliente to help address the critical issues of access to education, work, food, and self-empowerment. The restaurant is partially subsidizing a beautiful space where low-cost counseling and therapy for children and adults is offered. Marco and other managers of the restaurant are often asked for advice and to make presentations on vocational training for people with disabilities. Marco stresses that training is a

beginning, but employers need to be willing to hire the disabled. At a recent job fair for people with disabilities, 300 people showed up for 6 openings.

Another important program subsidized by Resiliente and Wellspring Karitas, is a cafeteria at a center where seasonal farm laborers and their families live when they arrive from southern Mexico to work in the sugar cane fields. Sugar cane harvesting is incredibly hard and dirty work. The laborers' work and their living conditions are deplorable (check out "A Sweet Deal" in the Netflix docuseries called "Rotten"). We have created a small oasis in the middle of a punishing life

with a colorful cafeteria where they can get a healthy and filling meal. This year, after participating in Wellspring Caritas learning delegations, **members of St. John's Lutheran Church in Boyertown, PA, Rotarians and Interactors from Arizona, and Everest Financial**, made donations that allowed us to support education and extracurricular activities for the laborers' children.

We hope to break the cycle where the children of farm laborers are condemned to become farm laborers. On the wall in the cafeteria is a colorful painting with an invitation that says, "¿Que quieres ser de grande?," what do you want to be when you grow up? At first sight, it seems like an innocent statement. After reflection, it suddenly dawns on us how **absolutely radical that question is. No child in the migrant center believes his or her future will be any different from the heart-breaking lives their parents**

live. Expansion of this program is urgent, so we can create hope for a brighter future for these at-risk families.



School water

A partnership example...

This year, coordinating with a coalition of Rotary Clubs, districts and the Rotary Foundation, the third safe school drinking water rainwater harvest project is nearing completion. The biggest of all, CONALEP Tepoztlán, is a technical high school with almost 600 students plus school staff. The school has no public water access. Water is delivered several times a week in 2,500 gallon tanker trucks and is definitely not potable. Our system captures rainwater from an arched roof over the school's basketball court which goes to a 70,000 gallon tank, and then off to the purification kiosk. Besides housing the filters and filling station, the kiosk is designed to be an educational experience for the students who will operate it. To guarantee the long-term sustainability of the system, we have invested considerably in the development and training of operating committees composed of students, parents and school staff.

This is a game changer for many students and their families; keeping the vital liquid flowing requires continued support, and with more resources we could reach thousands of students at dozens of schools across the state.



Contagious inspiration

One of the results of the excitement about our work is that we are attracting a number of volunteers and interns. Rodney Pitts, son of Arizona Rotary District 5495 governor Kevin Pitts, has been working at ALEM over the last couple months; joined by his brother he even accompanied me to Peru to assist our ally Hope Haven West seating 400 kids with paralysis in specialty wheelchairs. Next year we will have a young anthropology student from Bogota, Colombia doing her university internship to help us do a regional social mapping of the state of Morelos. There are others reaching out. How about you!!!

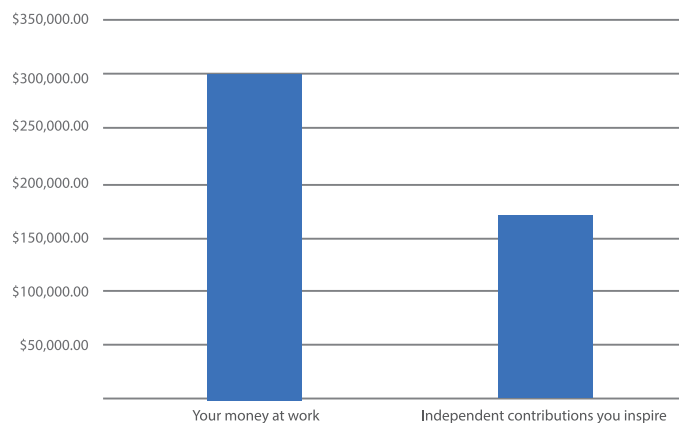
Let yourself be inspired

We are organizing 2024 Learning Delegations. **Come experience the projects first hand and allow yourself to be inspired** and transformed by the resilience of the groups we work with. Presently we have a couple of openings for **January 11th to the 16th**; let us know, we will be organizing other trips throughout the year.

The Greater Impact We Mobilize

Wellspring Karitas' budget is modest, but if you take into account the resources and generosity that your giving inspires in Mexico, our dollar per dollar impact increases significantly! For example: ALEM generates income and empowers local Rotary clubs and governments to underwrite the repair clinic's logistical expenses in their areas; La Estación counts on direct community financial support and other local organizations have been inspired by our work to come on board; our training and education programs have facilitated a substantial project to recover a lake and its environment in Iguala, Guerrero; women we are working with in one of the most at risk regions of Morelos, Axochiapan, have received significant outside support for the development of small-scale entrepreneurial projects by allies in Minneapolis (thank you Sandy Vargas).

Multiplying your impact



Please join us again and help to bring hope to today's marginalized, yet committed and engaged communities. Significant and life-changing impact is happening.

BECOME A FINANCIAL PARTNER

Open our website: karitasfoundation.org and click the Donate button. You can donate by PayPal or credit card. Send a check to Karitas, 1275 Rose Lane, Berwyn, PA 19312 friend.erik@gmail.com



To see stats, numbers, and measurable progress indicators, visit our website: www.karitasfoundation.org