



## SUMMARY REPORT – UN MUNDO CSEHP PROJECT 2015

December 16, 2015

### Introduction

Until recently, children with special needs in the Cangrejal River Valley weren't accommodated in public schools and had limited to no educational opportunities available to them. Moreover, lack of care for people with severe disabilities left too many youth completely dependent upon their families. In 2009, Un Mundo set about to correct these injustices, first by bringing children with disabilities to a school for special needs in the city of La Ceiba. For five years, children with special needs were welcomed into a formal learning environment for the first time in the valley's history, but they spent many hours on a bus rattling along dirt roads and away from their home communities, and they missed opportunities to be integrated into more inclusive learning environments. So, in 2014, the Cangrejal Special Education and Health Project (CSEHP) evolved into a more ambitious effort to transform educational opportunities throughout the river valley, and it has continued to grow to serve more people in need this past year.

In 2015, CSEHP brought individualized educational and health support to almost 50 children throughout seven communities and also supported teachers, parents, and local volunteers in eradicating the notion that people with special needs are less capable. Together, these various stakeholders learn how to create classrooms and communities that are inclusive and nurturing for all young people. Through the program, physical, language, and occupational therapy and other rehabilitative services are brought to children at least once per month, and CSEHP volunteer specialists give academic and other support two to three times per week. This strategy has made life-changing services available to a larger population, while also allowing for increased knowledge and participation of the local community and family members in each person's rehabilitation. Strategic partnerships and a combination of at-school and in-home care have allowed Un Mundo to develop truly individualized plans for each child and family. Neurological evaluations were also carried out for children with more severe disabilities, and the program made continued to make significant advances in prevention and health education.

### Major Activities and Achievements

In 2015, Un Mundo's CSEHP coordinator oversaw a team of seven volunteer specialists in providing a variety of forms of support to 47 children of all ages throughout the Cangrejal Valley. In the area of education, successes included:

- Incorporation of two new schools into the program, creating a network of seven participating schools
- Initial evaluation of 76 children in each of the seven schools to identify student needs, led by a psychologist, special educator, CSHEP specialist, and teacher. Forty-seven children were selected for the program, and 42 continued with the program throughout the entire school year.
- Collaborative development of a work plan for each school for making pedagogical strategies more participatory and inclusive, as well as recommendations for each child given to all teachers
- Involvement of 21 teachers across seven schools in developing more inclusive pedagogical strategies, benefitting all children in the schools
- Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) developed for 42 children according to their needs, with the support of occupational therapists from the University of North Carolina, a special educator, and psychologist



- Weekly at-school and/or in-home educational support given to 47 children across all grades
- Monthly evaluations by the project coordinator to identify strengths and weaknesses in teachers and CSHEP specialists, as well as to support in improving weak areas

In June and July, a support team of graduate students and professors in occupational and physical therapy from the University of North Carolina (UNC) worked with Un Mundo staff, volunteer specialists, teachers, and families to provide trainings, contribute to the development of IEPs, and help parents create plans to be able to help their children lead more independent lives. Un Mundo's partnership with UNC in this program continues to be a critical component of building local capacity to meet special educational and health needs.

A major part of the sustainability plan for the CSEHP is to train public elementary schools to be able to provide differentiated instruction to children of all ages in the future. Thus, in addition to collaborative work with the volunteer specialists in order to develop more effective pedagogical strategies, 21 teachers throughout the valley benefitted from three trainings given by local special education and health professionals on the following topics:

- Human rights and social and educational inclusion
- Sensitization and conceptualization as means of educational integration
- Curricular adaptation

It will be essential in 2016 to build upon the knowledge teachers gained through these trainings and to continue developing their skills in meeting diverse learning needs.

In addition to needing educational support, many children in the program have special medical needs. Important successes in the area of health and medical support in 2015 include:

- Evaluation of 10 children from the program by a pediatric neurologist in the Los Andes Clinic in San Pedro Sula
- Regular evaluation of all 42 children by a psychologist and special educator, and 45 children by an occupational therapist, who made monthly visits to each community to work with each child. In total, there were 99 hours of psychological therapy (30 minutes for each child in each visit) and 422 hours of occupational therapy (2 hours per child per visit).
- Physical and/or language therapy for six children
- In-home therapy from volunteer specialists for X children

Another major component of the project is building the capacity of families to support their children's needs. In addition to regular interaction with and training from the volunteer specialists, the CSEHP team provided three more formal trainings for parents, on the topics of:

- How to identify learning disabilities
- Educational adaptations for children with learning disabilities, interventions for behavioral difficulties, and visual strategies for children with disabilities
- Bullying in school and at home



One training was carried out by a local psychologist, one by a local special educator, and another by occupational therapists from UNC. The average rate of attendance by parents was 70%. One important goal for 2016 will be increasing attendance at these trainings as well as finding ways to measure subsequent behavior changes.

The Special Needs Association has played an increasingly important role in the project each year, working closely with the volunteers and teachers as their children are integrated into the local public schools. When needed, they have advocated for their children's education with school officials. Their work has become more sustainable as they continue to develop capacity and advance in the process of formalizing their group. Indeed, a significant achievement in 2015 was that the Association had all of the necessary documentation approved in order to gain legal recognition in 2016. Additionally, CSEHP has a board of directors that plans and leads quarterly meetings with the parents of all CSHEP children. The board holds monthly meetings and coordinates various tasks such as preparing monthly financial reports.

Finally, an essential element of CSEHP is developing strategies for preventing disabilities. This year, Un Mundo updated its disability reduction plan for 2016–2020, which includes the participation of parents, nurses, local health clinics, midwives, and health promoters. CSEHP also gave workshops for women and men in two communities on pre- and postnatal care, family planning, balanced diets, risky pregnancies, and adolescent pregnancies. Involving multiple local stakeholders in committing to reducing the incidence of disabilities in the valley in the future is an integral component of CSEHP's work.

### **Program Participant Successes**

Of the 76 children who were originally evaluated for the program, 47 started the program at the beginning of the year, and 42 continued through December. Each and every one of these 42 children made measurable advances in academic, social, emotional and other goals throughout the course of the year. After individualized goals were collaboratively established in February, the average increase in students' progress towards their goals by December was 66%. One student didn't make any progress on his stated goals because the original objective that he receive physical therapy was later modified after an evaluation by the pediatric neurologist. Otherwise, only three students made less than 40% progress toward their goals, 25 students progressed between 40% and 79%, and 16 students made 80% progress or above.

Much of the success of these children is thanks to the dedication and creativity of the seven CSEHP volunteer specialists, who devote hours every day to supporting children in school and in their homes and creating dynamic tools and strategies to improve learning for each child. Indeed, the volunteers have developed an impressive supply of tools and strategies that will continue to transform the learning experience for children in the valley for years to come.

### **Finances**

In 2015, a total of \$53,287 was contributed to CSEHP from a variety of sources, including individual donors and foundations. A total of \$41,566 has been spent as of November 30, 2015, which is only 77% of the \$54,215 that had been budgeted for this year. Accounting for the amount budgeted to be spent in December, the program should have a rollover of approximately \$10,000 in order to have a strong start in 2016.



**DIGNITY. COMMUNITY. SELF-SUFFICIENCY.**



## **Conclusion**

In 2015, CSEHP made great strides not only in giving almost 50 children positive, enriching experiences at school and in their daily lives but also in building the capacity of teachers and families throughout the region to be able to support people of all needs and ability levels in this region in the future. It was a year of great learning about providing specialized care for young persons with severe needs as well as supporting educators in meeting the diverse learning needs of all children. Furthermore, with two major leadership transitions — a new program coordinator for CSEHP at the beginning of 2015 and a new executive director for Un Mundo starting mid-year — the past twelve months have been a time of organizational growth and growing pains, with opportunities to effect positive change. Between December and January, past and current Un Mundo staff will be reflecting on this year's successes and challenges in order to make plans for 2016 that will most effectively meet the Cangrejales River Valley's educational and health needs.