

Foundations: Study Away Nicaragua By: Dr. Lisa Proctor and Dr. Letitia White



March 2012: Dr. DiSarno fitting one of Study Away Nicaragua's first patients for his new hearing aids

In fall 2012, Dr. Michael Steer, then a doctoral student in Audiology, approached Dr. Neil DiSarno with a proposal to develop a service-oriented study away program that would provide hearing aids to individuals living in Nicaragua. Dr. DiSarno and Dr. Letitia White were co-directors of the first Nicaragua Study Away trip in March 2012. That initial and all subsequent trips were facilitated by Chris and Barry Lydon, Dr. Steer's in-laws, who are missionaries living in Nicaragua. There have been four follow-up trips co-directed by Dr. White and Dr. Lisa Proctor: January 2013, January 2014, May 2014, and October 2014. In January 2013 and 2014, the primary focus was hearing screenings, providing hearing aids, and follow-up services. The May and October trips focused on follow-up services and expanded the scope of the program to work with schools providing services to children with severe disabilities. This expansion involved visiting three special schools in May of 2014 and again in October of 2014. The trip in October also included workshops for special schools' staff that focused on understanding hearing loss, augmentative and alternative communication and treatment of autism spectrum disorders, as well as providing consultative services in each school. A primary goal of the Nicaragua Study Away program is to develop and maintain relationships with the individuals with communication disorders and their families, as well as the staff of the special schools in order to provide sustainable services. We have found that these long term relationships are the critical element in ensuring that we provide services that are truly valued by the communities rather than what we think they need. To date, more than 40 students from MSU's Communication Sciences and Disorders department have participated in the Nicaragua Study Away program, providing services to more than 200 individuals. Each trip we and our students have been captivated by the welcoming and gracious nature of the people of Nicaragua. The opportunity to help such deserving people while providing an unparalleled opportunity for the professional growth of our students keeps us enthused about the program. Our next trip is scheduled for May 2015.



October 2014: Group photo after following up with a past audiology patient at her home in San Marcos

To learn more about Study Away Nicaragua:

Missouri State University
Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders
Phone: 417-836-5368
Email:
communicationsciencesanddisorders@MissouriState.edu

Website and Upcoming Study Away
Nicaragua Opportunities Coming Soon!

International Collaboration By: Nicole Higgins

During the May 2014 trip, professors and students were invited into three schools for children with special needs where they provided follow-up speech and language assessments for students who had previously received hearing aids. When not providing follow-up assessments, MSU students were encouraged to visit the different classrooms and observe. The classroom teachers shared that they would like more training on how to work with children who have special needs. With this in mind, a follow-up trip was scheduled for October 2014. One of the main purposes of the trip was to provide three educational workshops. The topics of the workshops included: hearing impairment, helping children who cannot speak, and Autism. A total of 46 parents and teachers attended the workshops. Informational handouts, supplies, and hands-on practice in techniques specific to each workshop topic was provided. Both teachers and parents actively participated in the workshops by sharing ideas, asking questions, and providing feedback on techniques currently used. The collaborative relationship between MSU and the parents and teachers of these Nicaraguan special schools was greatly strengthened through workshop interactions. Much was accomplished on this trip, but perhaps the most important gain was strengthening relationships with our international partners abroad.



“LA DISCAPACIDAD NO ES LO QUE LIMITA A LAS PERSONAS, SINO LAS ACTITUDES DE LOS DEMÁS.”



**“IT IS NOT THE DISABILITY THAT LIMITS A PERSON, IT IS THE ATTITUDES OF OTHERS.”
-UNKNOWN**

Working with Families

By: Lydia Cooper

Throughout our time in Nicaragua, we had the opportunity to interact with not only teachers and school personnel, but also the parents and families of children with disabilities. These interactions occurred both at the schools we visited as well as at our workshops. In fact at all of the workshops, there were parents in the audience. One mother in particular stood out to me. She attended every workshop we presented. She posed interesting and thought provoking questions regarding the diagnosis and treatment of Autism. We later met with her and her child to help provide her with additional information. We were able to spend time talking with her and interacting with the child through books and pictures. I was able to interact with the child in Spanish and observe his speech and language skills including making notations about the length of his expressive utterances as well as his social interaction skills. Throughout our interactions with this mother as well as other parents we met on the trip we were able to learn more about the educational system in Nicaragua as well as the parents' perspectives. Although many of the differences we saw between the two countries helped us to appreciate many of the resources and laws we have here in the United States, we also realized that there are many similarities between our two countries. In both countries, parents are important advocates for their children with special needs and teacher and parent collaboration is vital.



Literacy Perspectives

By: Rachel Ball

Traveling back to Nicaragua for a second time to collect data for my Master's research project was an incredible experience, to say the least. Not only was I able to see the positive impact of our prior services through the speech and language development of previous patients, but I was able to gain invaluable perspective on literacy development and instruction for the deaf and hard of hearing population in Nicaragua. During our time there, I followed up with a total of 10 children who had been fit with hearing aids on one of our past trips. I conducted literacy assessments with each child to identify areas of strength and areas for continued improvement. In addition, I was able to meet many of these children's parents and teachers and gain insight on learning strategies used at home and in the classroom. Through my conversations with our international partners, I realized that many of the same issues related to hearing loss are present in Nicaragua, just as they are in the United States. I learned about instructional strategies used in partnership classrooms. I also shared ideas and resources that I had put together based on observations made during my first visit. I was also able to put together and present a three-hour workshop about the effects of hearing loss on children's development and learning. During the workshop, strategies and materials for teaching children with hearing loss were provided to over 40 teachers. The entire experience opened my eyes to international collaboration and the importance of seeing things through other's perspectives.

Using Communication Boards

By: Jennica Enriquez

During the trip I had the opportunity to work with children with a variety of disabilities including Down syndrome. The schools we visited were for children with severe disabilities with classrooms for children with "mental deficits," autism, physical disabilities and hearing impairments. We observed classes where children's lack of use of expressive language interfered with their participation in classroom activities. During one of our classroom visits, we were interacting with a child that had limited verbal communication. Nicole pulled one of her handy-dandy communication boards to attempt communication with a particular child. I used colored blocks and Nicole's homemade color squares for the communication board to ask the child to match the squares with the same colored blocks. We were thrilled to realize that the child not only understood the task, but completed it correctly. We also asked the child to tell us how he felt. I still remember how he looked at me, surprising as he had very little eye contact prior to this, and pointed out the picture indicating he felt sad. After further probing, he communicated that he wanted to go outside. When we were outside, his facial expression was far more relaxed than when we were inside the classroom. We explained how to use and expand the communication board to the classroom teacher in order to further his language and communication. The teacher was thrilled to have a new tool and strategy to use and was overall very receptive towards using communication boards. While this is just one case where communication boards were helpful in the communication of a child, it was great to know how we may have positively impacted this child's life.

¡ MUCHAS GRACIAS !

We would like to sincerely thank all those who donated, both forwardly and anonymously, to help make this trip possible. Study Away Nicaragua would not be possible without the generosity of students, faculty, staff and friends of Missouri State University.



October 2014: Group photo after spending two days working with the teachers and students at José Sequiera Escuela Especial, a special school in San Marcos