



# Karitas Foundation

“Building Bridges, Celebrating Community”

[www.karitasfoundation.org](http://www.karitasfoundation.org)



Fundación  
Comunidad



This just may be the silver anniversary of Karitas in Cuernavaca, twenty-five years since we first visited La Estación, our initial mission project in Mexico. A year or two later 20,000 pounds of transmission cores were off-loaded by a small circle of young adults who would become Frisan Automotriz, the first worker/owner business of SAPECO, our micro-economic development project. A handful of people, names we were learning to pronounce, faces we were coming to respect and love. What a difference these decades have made!

It's difficult to track the *numbers*. They were truly a handful that quarter century ago. Someone recently asked me over lunch, “How many people are affected by the work of Karitas in Mexico?” That piqued my curiosity, so I flipped over the placemat and began to scribble some numbers. Knowing that changing one life almost always impacts a significantly wider circle around that life, I ventured a conservative total – five hundred!

It's wonderful to know the *names*. Whenever I visit La Estación the kids scramble onto my lap, stroke my hair and beard, and insist I must be some relation to Papa Noel. Each visit I add to the list of parents and grandparents I know by name at the community center. There are continually new SAPECO- spawned shops to visit, the rapidly expanding team at the Texcal water project, fresh arrivals to the wheelchair fleet at ALEM. They call me Javier . . . as Howard is difficult to pronounce for Mexicans.

## Our Partner in Mexico: Comunidad

*We have written in the past about the challenge of encouraging and supporting the gradual emergence of philanthropy in Mexico, an uncommon concept in the Latin American socio-economic structure. Cultural structures do not change easily. This year, Comunidad, our partner community foundation, welcomed two new board members from the business community, who are being financially generous and working to spread their passion to their peers – the enthusiasm they bring is contagious. “Supporting the Comunidad initiative is a great experience and challenge . . . you are raising the bar with your attitude, care and expectations . . . sharing your love and passion to do something for others before yourself, a big lesson in life,” shares Jorge Romero CEO of Buckman Laboratories*

But the greatest joy is the *faces*. Eyes alive with hope and possibility, broad smiles of appreciation, voices eager to “tell their story” and invite me to tell mine . . . and such stories! Narratives of struggle, of dim hope and bleak futures – now writing fresh chapters filled with vision and hope, concrete opportunities to craft a promising and fulfilling futures.

This newsletter brings some names and faces to you. They not only *tell* the story, they *are* the story. A story that is only possible because of you, our steady and generous donors.

Faithfully,  
*Howard Friend*

## AUTONOMÍA LIBERTAD EN MOVIMIENTO

ALEM has taken off! Overcoming internal and external barriers, we have secured contracts, developed an expanding relationship with government, and reaped the harvest of steady coaching. Wheelchair repair remains the backbone of our work. We have designed prototype wheelchairs for people with special needs. But six months ago we made a “breakthrough” into the sport wheelchair market, filling orders from three county governments.

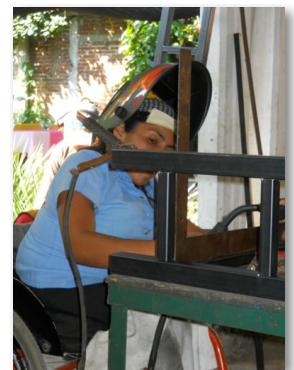
The impact of the project is far more than production. It is about transforming participants’ lives and their communities. Mario, new to the project, lost his leg. “I had been the bread winner of the family . . . three months later I was a burden . . . and my family let me know it. I was in bad shape. Abused by my family, I came to ALEM and found harmony, friendship and trust. Pancho and Gilberto lent me a hand, helping me find my worth again. My life has changed. It’s as if I were complete again! ALEM is my ‘home.’ I ‘walk’ around, cook and iron, sweep and clean . . . and I do all the upholstery work. The people in my community felt sorry for me, but *now they see me with my crutches but they look at me differently. They see I am active, most look at me with admiration.* Before I thought I was worthless, but now I am useful; I help others; I can go to the supermarket and help my aunt. I am proud of our team, my ‘family,’ and the way we can change people’s ideas about disabilities.” Alex, who joined us two years ago, has a rare disease that creates tumors in his body,



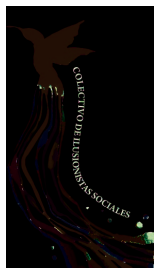
which could be life-threatening, and put him in a wheelchair; Alex shares his own process, “Before ALEM my life was ordinary, barely relevant . . . my community did not see me as a productive person. Now they are surprised by what I can do. They even saw me on TV! It used to be taboo to talk about my disability with my family, but now we talk about it all the time . . . disability has become a way of living for me. Technically, I have learned to use special design software and many other skills allowing us to dream together a common dream . . . the work we have done is proof of the project’s value. I want ALEM to be nationally renowned. Let’s not be afraid to succeed and double our productive capacity this year!”



ALEM has crafted a model calling out for replication on two fronts 1) there are potential partner/participants in other areas too far away to be part of ALEM, and 2) there are people in need of wheelchairs and repairs everywhere. Because wheelchair repair is so expensive, before ALEM most people in Cuernavaca had to go to Mexico City. Let’s set-up another shop, then learn to franchise the model!



## SOCIAL ILLUSIONISM



Social Illusionism, a way of working *with* instead of *for a* community, has been a tool we *employ* in the projects creating enthusiasm and stimulating incredible, spontaneous community initiatives and action – *far* beyond what we could have planned. While celebrating the transformational results of this approach in all of our projects, Juan Manuel, Polina and Erik – the team promoting this tool – also express *personal* transformation. Juan Manuel, a social worker states, “When we first went to the community, the people would ask us ‘what are you selling,’ as we put up a clothesline of brightly colored paper on which people had written their hopes. The children asked, ‘how much does it cost to hang-up my hope.’ Over time, as we built trust, sharing spans the full range of emotions that accompany everyday life; people start to share their

hopes; enthusiasm builds and possibilities become concrete. In la Estación I have learned to value my own heritage, to recognize that chaos, living on the ‘edge,’ you need to appreciate every moment, not always thinking about whether something makes sense or not.” Polina, a young volunteer from the US and Russia, reflects “This has been a revolutionary experience for me. I have learned to work at the pace of the people, to respond to *their* ideas and initiatives; I see how they are empowered when they come to appreciate what they are already doing as a community. Their hopes can create healthy and beautiful change. Personally, I have learned how to spend time with people, how to create healthy social networks with our neighbors, how to share ideas, struggles and joys; and how to let myself be ‘infected’ by the desire to live a better life.”



## LA ESTACIÓN COMMUNITY CENTER

[More on our Website](#)

La Estación is a community with a large population in a small geographic area. *Though it is easy to get lost.* With few formal streets, hundreds of tiny alleyways run between homes made of mostly cardboard, box springs and mismatched, randomly stacked cinder blocks. These alleyways network through this extremely marginalized community, sometimes allowing residents to come together safely to work toward common dreams, but at other times are full of tension and conflict, unsafe and dangerous related to the struggle for limited resources and the ever present temptation of dealing drugs, for some a means of survival.

The community center that we/you have been supporting for 10 years is an important place of light and gathering – a space where dreams come true – like Brianda and Ilsa who are in college and the mothers who are making artisan products they can sell for extra income. But there are thousands more people in the community, so we have decided to get to know them, their activities and their initiatives, their dreams and their struggles. Ten years, 160 breakfasts each day, a space for both formal presentations by universities and other institutions as well as a safe gathering place for the community to support each other and we help support five teachers in the Kindergarten.



"I just love this thing we call 'relational mapping,'" Lupita said enthusiastically. "We are reaching out to others, walking and talking, making a map of groups and relationship, initiatives and

struggles as we go. And we take the lead!" We found green havens, flowers and vegetables, in everything from paint pails to wash tubs; we found spontaneous sporting events invented by the kids, like kicking plastic bottles against an old stone wall, and incredible murals painted by community young people depicting their dreams and struggles; and, we also found "death contingents" groups of addicts, having lost all hope for a better life, accompanying each other into death and sharing the mourning of the most recent to depart.



Through the mapping we see it all, the reality of pain that must be faced, but stories of hope and solidarity to be lifted up, affirmed and celebrated, offering the community hearty encouragement to appreciate and cherish the rich possibilities the future holds. In the atmosphere of hope, we are not surprised when new initiatives emerge spontaneously – naturally and organically.

Even as desperately needed re-construction of the community center is about to start, the group is already thinking about the model they have created and how it can be replicated in other communities, as Guillermina says, "there are a lot of people in need."

## THE AWAKENING THE DREAMER SYMPOSIUM

The Awakening the Dreamer Symposium is an awareness raising and motivational tool we offer to get people involved in the creation of a sustainable, just and fulfilling world. This one young woman's testimony captures it all:

"If I were to begin writing about how the Symposium has influenced my life I would start out by saying: *sigh*. Why sigh???"

Because just thinking about it is overwhelming. My sense of purpose (as if that is a light thing to talk about) was found inside of me when I took the Symposium, Thanks to my friends who invited me to the symposium, my life was toppled-over into my lap for me to stare at and realize that there was so much to do and so little time. My profession, heart, and sense of being were questioned and

then, out of a blue, a new beginning: a fresh new start on things; I was a key factor in contributing to a better world, one where individual efforts matter and are valued and weigh-in at the end of things. I cannot be more thankful, and now I cannot feel more blessed, in blessed unrest."



## ECOMUNITARIA

Patronato de San Anton, a project initiated by young people, cleaning the ravines and forming a network of recycling centers, has taken an important step forward. Karitas accompanied them in becoming an independent social enterprise called "Ecomunitaria" (Ecology + Community.) The project, no longer confined to the community of San Anton, is offering training and is networking with the Texcal project team – ten miles across town. They have been recognized by the federal government's National Department of

Environment, negotiating a 6-month grant for employment creation. This project could become self-sufficient. Profit margins remain low, but their passion as a team sustains their motivation. The purchase of a Polyethylene Granulating Machine to shred plastic bottles would take them to a new level, doubling per pound profit and enhancing competitiveness.

## EL TEXCAL

When you don't let planning and objectives get in the way of the possibilities that want to emerge spontaneously, "impossibility" stops being a limitation to the greater potential present within the community. Jorge Romero, General Manager of Buckman Laboratories is happy, though the project looks nothing like what he had envisioned, "I thought the project was about setting up a treatment plant. Now I realize that, when you take time to ask the community, you find out there are many more options. What we end up with is a replicable model that is not only transforming ourselves and the community around us, but a model that can be taken and applied around the world. Our company has a presence in 11 countries; the plant in Brazil is already adopting some aspects. The stream running through the plant complex isn't a whole lot cleaner yet. Working closely with the project I have come to understand that sustainable solutions take time and working together with the community is complex, but it offers us a whole range of un-thought-of

benefits." A twenty year resident of the Texcal community, Rocío watched her quiet community recycling project of eight years take a quantum leap forward this year. "After Comunidad presented that Awakening the Dreamer Symposium at Buckman, I realized how urgent my work is," Rocío exclaimed, her eyes dancing. "I joined the community mapping team and we are looking for ways to expand recycling in the community and started composting as well." Irma another resident explains, "we have learned a lot from Juan Manuel and Polina and from the participants from UPEMOR (a participating polytechnic university), but we have also learned a lot from each other like the uses of the plants in the ecological park, or making things together like vertical planters from recycled material." Moises adds, "when I close my eyes I can see it – a cleaner community, more socializing among neighbors, everyone pitching in. With this project it can happen!"



## AN OPPORTUNITY YEAR: LET'S DO IT!

- Karitas' presence in Cuernavaca has passed a "tipping point" and it's about trust. Building trust-based partnerships, is a slow, tedious process. But, we have succeeded! We are widely viewed as compassionate, trust-worthy and committed,
- That yields boundless opportunities to serve, potential new projects and expansion of current ones, all poised to have extraordinary impact on countless lives. If someone wrote a check for a million dollars, we could put every dollar toward effective, life-transforming projects . . . immediately!
- This is a difficult economy to maintain current income, let alone seek significant increases. But that is exactly what we hope to do!

After careful assessment of all those possibilities, **we have set a "stretch goal" of \$75,000 in new, renewed or increased gifts!** *An extraordinarily generous donor has pledged, as a challenge commitment, to increase their current giving by: \$5,000 if there are five new \$1,000 donors; an additional \$5,000 if there are five at \$5,000; and, \$10,000 more if there are five \$10,000 gifts. We invite you to become a financial partner!*

We want to connect with you in every way possible. Wander our website: review our mission and vision statements, meet our board, watch an extraordinary photo essay about ALEM, and explore opening each project site in turn. We can provide our IRS tax exempt certificate, a copy of our 990 charitable organization filing in Pennsylvania. Or, give Howard Friend a call.

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## SAPECO

SAPECO has inspired a number of worker-owned shops, mostly transmission repair; some we started and others have spun-off. They remain connected in an informal network and we continue to offer them support, advise and facilitation. We most delight in watching them

transition from *needing* a hand to *lending* a hand. Ivan Madero, only seventeen when he and his partners started the first shop twenty years ago, wipes off his hands and explains with a smile, "I am so grateful to have found Karitas. Thanks to this project, many jobs have been created, the lives of whole families improved. Those who work with us learn a trade, become skilled mechanics, some opening their own shops. SAPECO taught us to respect each other, offer a fair workplace, and pay fair wages. And something else. Though we learn business skills here, we realize money isn't everything. There are more important values like spirituality, morality, culture and the opportunity to meet incredible people." Yolanda Hernandez writes, "I started as an employee. When they told me about the project, I didn't believe it could work. But I became a partner. Karitas entrusted so much to us we felt committed to keep going; we could not let them down. The way I used to think people should be treated in a business has changed. I value the importance of offering opportunities to willing and enthusiastic people and helping our community."