

MARY'S PENCE (www.maryspence.org)

Gilda Larios of Mary's Pence interviews **Reyna Moreno Lazo**, Esteli, Nicaragua

Hello. My name is Reyna Moreno Lazo and I am working for the Nicaraguan Women's Network, which receives grants from Mary's Pence. Right now I am working as the Facilitator of the Network, focusing on organizational development, which is a major part of our mission and which is being supported by Mary's Pence. I would like to discuss the economic dependence that can occur in a group or in an entire community. It is a broad and complicated topic, but when we consider the financial support that we receive, we think that such dependence can hurt the people in the communities. One of the things that we take into consideration is the lesson I learned with St. Louis Missouri Hermanamiento, where I worked for a number of years. We used to go into the community and help the people financially with their everyday needs, but soon we realized that we were creating dependency between the people and our group. Because of this, we initiated a program that fostered collective action instead of dependency. For example, if we all had a project, the people would contribute food or money to the effort, which would benefit everyone. We were able to teach the people to contribute and actively participate in projects that would benefit the community, instead of just giving them financial support. We want to create sustainable projects that gradually eliminate dependency. We have a saying that we make programs instead of projects, because projects just last for a little while and offer temporary work. Our programs support women's rights, provide training, and teach people how to work, and thus become resources for women's learning. This way, when we—the programmers and volunteers—stop going to a town, the women will be able to run the programs by themselves. We want to bring things to the communities, and then once the women have the right tools, they will be able to enact what they have learned. With this philosophy we empower the people and teach them how to develop the resources they have and recognize the potential in their communities. The women are not dependent on any particular amount of money.

Gilda: Could you give an example, such as the massage workshops and how they relate to the culture of the community and the needs of the people?

One thing that is very important in avoiding dependency is to identify what the people are interested in instead of just telling them our ideas. It is better to establish a relationship of idea sharing, so that we can establish the projects together. In this case, we looked at what the people needed and were interested in, and we created workshops for ceramics, sewing, and massage. The ceramic group has worked very well because it is a part of the culture that has been handed down by the women's grandmothers, and they already had all of the resources and just needed to improve their work. In the sewing group, things have been a little more difficult because it is not part of the culture. In answer to Gilda's question, the massage groups—things have been difficult because in this country, people do not get massages to relax. Because of this, the massage group, which consisted of more than ten women, hasn't found the customers

that they need. Also, in Nicaragua the issue of machismo would definitely prevent women from giving massages to the others' husbands all the time, so there are a lot of cultural elements that have prevented this program from working. As organizations, we need to be aware of this. We are giving them the resources, knowledge, and materials that they need and we want them to learn how to use them. This isn't to say that we will stop giving financial support, but when we are trying to strengthen the communities and hope that one day the women will be able to form an independent and self-sustainable collective.

Gilda: And the last question—would you like to say anything to Mary's Pence's donors?

Thank you so much for all of your support. I am so happy to have known Mary's Pence since 2000, and it has been a beautiful experience because I have seen the complete transformation of the entire Rio Abajo community. Without your support and solidarity, these changes would not have been possible. I just ask you to continue supporting groups like ours because the small seeds that we plant together have a huge potential. We work to create unified groups that work together in solidarity.

For more information:

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