

Rey Solomon School sees changes, additions

MANAGUA - If you've been to the Rey Solomon School in Managua, Nicaragua, (which we affectionately refer to as Oscar's school) in the last year and a half, you'll notice some changes in the building.

As you walk in the school entrance, you'll notice new classrooms directly over head which weren't there before. Continuing down the long walkway, past the courtyard, and directly below the school office and Oscar's office, you'll observe a beautiful, new, enlarged classroom where two small drab ones used to be. The old classrooms used to contain only row upon row of small, well-worn desks. The new classroom contains unusual items like parallel bars on a raised platform, a small staircase, gym mats, and large closets filled with a treasury of learning tools. The shiny, richly tiled floor seems fit for a king by Nicaraguan standards. The bright white dropped ceiling covers the previously seen maze of dusty, metal beams and tin. The walls are adorned with a peaceful mural in the beautiful colors so characteristic of Nicaragua. This is the home of the Agape Group, Special Education classes.

Though the classroom is certainly different than before, even more exciting are the changes in people's lives. There are now more than 25 Special Needs children in the school, most of whom have never been able to attend a school before or who have had bad experiences in previous school situations (like eager, sweet-spirited Bayardo, who tells of being poked in the eye with a pencil and bitten on his cerebral palsy-misshapen hand at his last school).

And these children are not just attending school here. They're growing and thriving! When our first Special Needs mission team saw these children in January, 2005, they were quiet and shy, not smiling or showing much emotion. We have returned with Special Needs mission teams every 6 months since and each group finds the children happy, outgoing, loving and growing in so many ways.

The growth that takes place among these students may not look like that of a typically developing student; but it was achieved by struggling through a much harder fought battle than is required of most students. We watch with amazement as Ramses sits still, engaged in an activity much longer than previously possible for his overloaded nervous system. Our little poster-boy with Cerebral Palsy and an incredible smile, Jairo, has improved ability to grasp his pencil and form his letters. This delights us as well as him and gives his mom encouragement. We greatly rejoice that Lucia's spastic body movements are more controlled which will help her use a picture board or other assisting devices to unlock her bright mind to communicate



Top to bottom, left to right:

1: A strong roof goes on the classrooms just inside the school entrance. This roof was then the floor for the new classrooms constructed on the 2nd floor for the regular education students relocated by the Special Education Program (1-05); 2: Bathroom construction begins in the Special Education Classroom; 3: Storage closets are constructed in the Special Education Classroom; 4: Completed Agape Group Special Education Classroom



with others. Tears come to our eyes as tiny Jasson shows us his new skill of rolling across the floor and getting to a sitting position...all by himself when previously he had no ability to move on his own!

Other Special Education students show progress as they are incorporated into the regular classrooms. Following the training session our Learning Disability Special Education teacher from Indianapolis conducted during our January 2006 mission trip, the director of the Agape program, Ruth, was able to take what she learned and train many of the regular education teachers in ways to help adapt their lessons for the different learning styles and abilities of each of their inclusion students. As the teachers have become acquainted with these Special students, they have become more accepting and affectionate toward them, as have the other students in the school.

When the Agape Group first started, the regular education students would stand back and stare at the Special Education students.

Changes at school (continued)

But as they have either been in class with these Special Needs children, eaten lunch with them or perhaps watched them playing in the courtyard, the regular education students have become more comfortable with them and are learning to see them as just another kid. Members of the Agape Group have been included in other school-wide functions like the Heritage Festival and in leading the rest of the school in weekly devotions. Some of the regular education children were so impressed and moved by the Agape Group's presentation for devotions that they asked when they could do it again. We were blessed to see this presentation during our June trip this year. Members of our group were openly sobbing as God's special instruments used their gifts to glorify Him.

The individual accomplishments of each Special Needs child and those of the program, in general, give the Special Needs parents so much hope. We've seen parents (who originally refused to send their Special child out of the relative safety of their tin shack because they knew that other children would make fun of or hurt them) send their Special Needs child to school every day with brushed hair and clean clothes. This gives not only structure to the entire family's day, but rest to the

over-tired care-givers, a place of acceptance for their child, and hope for their child's future. Some of these same family members have become regulars at church, showing hope for the eternal future of these SN families, as well.

Yes, there have been many changes to Oscar's school and the community of people associated with it. We thank God that He's teaching this new generation of Nicaraguans not to "...look at the things that man looks at" because "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7b) We're also thankful that our wise and all-knowing God "...has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, **just as he wanted them to be....**" And that we're all learning that "there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be **weaker are indispensable**, and the parts that we think are **less honorable we treat with special honor.**" (I Corinthians 12: 19-22) God is truly using each of these Special Need children in their uniqueness to bring glory to Him! What a wonderful addition to the Rey Solomon School!

--Jill Sima



A group of Agape students using their gifts to praise God during the devotional time that they led for the entire school



Eager, sweet-spirited Bayardo is fitted for a new splint by Erika, an OT from TX, to help hold his hand (which is affected by Cerebral Palsy) in a better position



Jairo flashes one of his great smiles as he enjoys a dance class along with others from the Agape Group. This dance class was held in June of 2005 by Brittany with the Special Needs Mission Group from TPCC



Ramses engaging in an activity with his mom and Special Education teacher, Cathy, from Indianapolis



Agape students playing in the courtyard and "fitting right in" at Oscar's school! What a great addition!



Adbbely and Bayardo representing the Agape classroom in the school-wide Heritage Festival



Tiny Jasson demonstrating his new skill of getting to a seated position all by himself!!!