

DESERT BLOOMS

February 2011

Our vision for Proyecto Santo Niño is that it become more and more of the people, a sustainable project that draws its spirit from the spirit of those that it benefits. We continue to make baby steps toward that goal. This month, two of our youngest mothers became the clinic cocineras (cooks)! In the past, we brought rice and crock pots of beans to share with our clinic families for lunch, but now the food preparation is completely in the hands of these two women, Lupe and Tania. Both are single mothers with very little support, and their new responsibility at the clinic is a source of income as well as pride.

Tania is only seventeen years old and the mother of adorable two year old Reyna who has Down's Syndrome. Tania is an orphan herself and has spent most of her life living with different relatives but never really having a place to belong and know love. She now lives with Reyna in a small cement apartment that is simple but for her represents a place to call home, perhaps for the first time in her life. At the end of January, Tania decided to take a job at a restaurant in downtown Juarez in order to have some form of income for her little family. She would work Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for eight hours each day and earn the equivalent of thirty dollars total. She would have to travel alone on the ruta, or public bus, arriving home at night in the dark. Worst of all, she would have to find and pay for childcare for Reyna. This is the reality for many in Ciudad Juarez – working jobs that pay way too little and even place the people in unsafe situations.

Thankfully, Tania is now working at the clinic instead. She is able to be near Reyna while she works, she receives transportation to the clinic in our van, and she makes the same amount of money working for just a few hours two times a week that she would have made in twenty four hours of work at the restaurant.

Lupe is a single mother of three girls, the oldest of whom she had when she was a teenager. Her youngest daughter, Monserrath, age five, has cerebral palsy. Lupe constantly struggles to provide

food for her family and diapers and medicine for Monse. The steady income from the clinic, albeit small, is reassuring.

It is a true joy to watch Lupe and Tania in the kitchen. The first day of their new job, they both were quite nervous about what others might think of their food, but they donned aprons and got right to work. After receiving encouragement and positive feedback from the other mothers, they were able to breathe and smile – big, beautiful,

genuine smiles. Now, they look like professionals. They love trying out new recipes and laugh with each other as they work. It is easy to sense a change in both of them, as if a light that has always been deep inside of them has suddenly been allowed to shine. Both of them are more confident and know that they are contributing something very important to life at the clinic. The aroma of delicious food cooking throughout the morning hours enhances the home-like atmosphere and the feeling of family we share. After the work is done, we sit down and break bread together, a symbol of the communion we share with one another and Jesus.

For many women in Latin America, daily life is mundane and grueling. There are few chances for them to develop talents or a personal identity, and their self worth is rarely affirmed.

Even something as small as being a cook in our little clinic is a form of empowerment. It reinforces the beauty and potential in these women as children of God and cultivates a sense of pride in who they are and what they bring. Thank you, because your gifts to us make possible this place where people like Tania and Lupe can discover the gifts inside themselves.



Photos

- Top right: Lupe (on left) and Tania work together on food prep
- Center: Our two cocineras show off their delicious cuisine!