

Expanding: Education and Development

School is on vacation this week here in Honduras. Laura and I have taken the opportunity of no kids at the school to do some cleaning and organizing. Today, we, our volunteer Matt, and a family who has their youngest child at our school, tackled the storage space. It has been a catch-all for everything for the past five years. Everything has been randomly thrown together, with pounds of dust and grime covering everything, and more than a few ugly critters having claimed the space as their home. Early in the day, a scorpion scooted up my hand before I flicked it off. But after five hours, we had accomplished some tremendous work. We discovered things that will have great value for our school, educational and building materials, that we simply didn't know we had. It's all now organized, relatively clean, and categorized. We will be putting almost all of what we found to good use, benefitting our school's efforts while saving time and money.



Unattended storage space

I'm thinking of our work today at the storage space as a metaphor for what we're doing at Shoulder to Shoulder. After years of doing the same thing, stuff gets piled up until the point where you don't even know what you have. It's important to dig into the mess, discern what is of value, throw out what is no longer of use, reorganize, take an inventory, and move on to where you need to be headed. For over five years now, Shoulder to Shoulder's ongoing medical mission has been the primary responsibility of the contractual agreement for a decentralized model of health care that we secure with the government of Honduras. But we have still been trying to support this decentralized model through administration and operations. The Convenio (the short term for the decentralized model under the contract) paid for all the professional staff and implemented the medical mission by way of the dictates of the contract and the Honduran Ministry of Health. But we (Shoulder to Shoulder that is not subsidized by the contract) have been trying to manage it and provide for operational needs. But recently, in digging through the clutter of the last five years, we realized two things. First, the Convenio is perfectly able to manage itself and provide for its own operational needs. Second, our sustained attention to the managerial and operational needs of the Convenio was unnecessarily time consuming. Meanwhile, the other missions of Shoulder to Shoulder, those that have become our legacy like medical mission trips and new missions such as education and our bilingual school, have not had the attention that they demand, deserve, and need. So our recent look into the storage space of Shoulder to Shoulder has yielded some previously unrecognized treasures that we intend to put to good use for the sustainability of our medical mission and the expansion of Education and Development.



As of June 1st, the Convenio has taken absolute responsibility for itself, making a claim on its sustainability for the ongoing provision of health care and community health services in the Frontera. Shoulder to Shoulder will still assist the Convenio, but in very specific and meaningful ways. Professional sharing in best medical practices will continue with medical mission trips and professional volunteers. Capital investments in state-of-the-art equipment will be advanced by particular donations. We will also always be ready with intervention when we encounter particular cases of medical need that cannot be performed within the limited structures of the Convenio. What Shoulder to Shoulder won't do is buy any more lightbulbs, or fight with any more water boards, or attempt to manage the way the Convenio envisions providing ongoing medical care to the over 70,000 residents who are entrusted to their care. The Convenio will manage all of this on its own. What Shoulder to Shoulder can boast of is that it has created, managed, and advanced a system of care that can in turn now boast that it is 100% Honduran and sustainable.



Dr. Rigoberto Marquez with patients

So what's left for us to do? Plenty! Laura and I have recently moved to Camasca to be closer to our bilingual school. We are greatly enjoying the cooler climate. We are present at the school on a daily basis, insuring that we maintain a bilingual education of excellence. We are supervising our volunteers (at present we have five), assisting our teachers, overseeing ongoing goals and projects. We are focusing our energies on making sure this unique experiment in Honduras, the only public bilingual school with a private/public partnership, works. We are seeing great results there, and we expect to see even greater ones. Oh, yes, we are also overseeing the upcoming construction of a new building with three new classrooms. We are also working with our new brigade coordinator, Moises Vallecillo, who started June 1 as well. Laura and I recognize that the roots of Shoulder to Shoulder are mission trips. We want to insure they keep coming. We want more to come. We will focus our energies on satisfaction for those who visit us and promotion for those who ought to be. We are also overseeing the implementation of our recently signed contract with the Mathile Institute and the delivery of the child nutritional supplement Chispuditos. The product has already arrived and we are excited that the nutritional program offers the hope of ridding our area of the unacceptable consequences of malnutrition. This, and a hundred other things, we are doing. We are excited, however, to give these missions our full attention toward the expansion of Shoulder to Shoulder.



Our goals as Shoulder to Shoulder are to create sustainable systems of empowerment that yield enrichment and development. It is clear that we are accomplishing these goals. Someday Shoulder to Shoulder will no longer exist. Its name will be forgotten. But its legacy will endure in those who were healed, fed, educated, empowered, and ultimately respected. This is an organization to get behind because it does what it says it does.