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I moved to a rural indigenous community near San Miguel de Allende in 2007. At that time, and ever since, I was the only American woman living alone in a house I’d built. There were no other complete houses, no bus service, no internet, cable or phones. My neighbors daily collected wood for cooking on the ground. Most of the adults were illiterate, most of the children had never read a book or gone to school beyond the 6th grade.

Curious children passed by every day, looking for me and my two pets, a small dog and cat. One day I gave each of them a new pencil. Another day I invited 8 children into my patio to sit at a table with their new pencils and two sheets of recycled paper. They were busy, joyful and amazingly creative. After an hour they cleaned up and skipped happily out the gate, saying “gracias!” They kept coming, more and more children. I offered more tables, chairs and simple materials. Later came help and books from folks who’d heard about this opportunity for rural kids.

The important thing is that this happened and grew in response to the children. They were the force that showed me how their curiosity propelled them to explore, discover and learn. There had been no plan on my part, I didn’t teach them anything. I offered them a space and some materials. I stood by and watched as they found in themselves the spark for learning.

This activity continued at my house every week, and by 2010 we named ourselves Ojala Niños and became a registered non-profit organization, offering over 100 children opportunities in arts, literacy, music, health, sports and social service. We never turned down someone who came through the gate to offer yet another skill or other opportunity to learn. Every foot of my property became a learning space and we expanded to a neighbors property to accommodate more children.

Einstein said: “I don’t teach my students; I give them a place to learn. Imagination is more important than knowledge.” Ojala Niños is a place to learn; space, materials, ideas and guidance inspire every child to find their joy and their purpose.

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2020 Highlights

January
A new Board of Directors is installed.
Ojalá Niños participates in the annual San Miguel Writer’s Conference.

February
Ojalá Niños founder, Elsmarie Norby turns 80 and announces her retirement.
Three King’s Day is celebrated at Ojalá Niños.

March
The Board President meets with other NGOs to discuss collaboration opportunities.
With the worsening of the pandemic, the board shuts down all activities requiring close contact.

April
The pandemic’s impact is not only on health but also on the economy of Ojalá Niños initially sponsors an ad hoc food bank in San Miguel Viejo.
This is followed by collaboration with food based NGOs (Feed the Hungry, Amigos al Cien, and others) to make sure every household in SMV has food in the table.

May
Food dispensas continue within San Miguel Viejo.
Not forgetting our educational mission, weekly safe distribution of learning kits to the children begins.
This helps to help maintain the children’s engagement and love of learning.
The Board President meets with San Miguel’s office on NGOs to discuss acceptable activities during the pandemic and collaboration amongst NGOs post-pandemic.

June
We receive a grant from “Little Things Matter” in support of the food dispensa program and the weekly learning kits.

July
The search for an Executive Director begins.
The board and staff begin a review of all programs offered by Ojalá to ensure what is being offered is what is needed most.

August
Needed changes to the Articles of Incorporation (Acta) are finalized.
New By-Laws are approved ensuring continuity and transparency.
Irene Fuentes joins Ojalá Niños as the Director of Communications and Outreach.

September
The new and improved Ojalá Niños website is launched.
Review and update all policies and procedures is initiated. It will be complete by February 2021.
Ojalá Niños is recognized by Microsoft as an international non-profit.

October
Ojalá Niños is accepted into Google for Nonprofits.
A performance of “The Ghost Circus” or “El Circo Fantasma” is presented by and on behalf of Ojalá Niños. This streamed production was available anywhere in the world with internet access.

November
Pilot Pens provides kits for the children as we continue our weekly learning activities.
A push for volunteers at all levels is initiated.
A grant from San Miguel Community Foundation was received to start a sewing atelier to teach sewing to the people of San Miguel Viejo.

December
Development of a 5 year strategic plan is started.
Irene Fuentes accepts the position of Executive Director as of 1 January.
Ojalá Niños successfully participates in #GivingTuesday under the auspices of Global Giving.
The amount of support received is tremendous.

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The situation in San Miguel Viejo, a rural community on the outskirts of San Miguel de Allende in Central Mexico is even more devastating since families don't have internet access to continue children's education and parents have lost income.

To address this issue, we started a process of restructuring our program in such way so that we can contribute to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on learning. We began by creating activity packages for the children to do at home, which included materials and instructions so that children can continue learning things, fostering their creativity and at the same time having fun in the confinement.

This has been very successful. In 2020 we delivered more than 700 activity packages to the children of the community, generating engagement with them and their parents.

In 2021, we'll not only continue with the delivery of activity packages, but also we'll start using integrated and interactive learning processes, outdoor lessons with health safety measures, to foster the life-skills needed to prepare children to take their rightful place in the economic order, such as: Science, Technology, Arts, Mathematics and Reading Encouragement, so children can improve their critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, communication, and creativity skills.

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The future is bright

The path forward for Ojalá Niños is clear and the future is bright!

I say that fully aware of the challenges that we all faced in 2020. The toll of COVID-19 is incalculable. Millions of lives have been lost, and billions have felt the impact. The suffering is palpable in the air. Yet, Ojalá Niños continued to safely meet our mission: providing integrated learning programs for the children of San Miguel Viejo to inspire creativity, critical thinking and self-confidence.

And we did more than just meet the mission. We prepared for the future. We will emerge from the pandemic more robust and resilient. We are building on our strengths – a solid history, a dedicated staff, an educational philosophy that fosters critical thinking, and our vision where every child can reach their full potential. We are reviewing every facet of Ojalá Niños and have identified four areas of change that will strengthen us now and into the future. We are Ojalá Niños 2.0 – Excelling in a Post-Pandemic World.

**Strengthen our Foundation** - We have integrated our core values of Learning, Opportunity, Integrity and Inclusion into every fiber of the organization. This ensures that we are not only doing the right things, but we are doing them in the right way. We have changed our programs, by-laws and policies, and even our organizational structure and relationship with our volunteers and donors to reflect our core values.

**Continuous Assessment & Improvement** - The children of Ojalá must be prepared for whatever the future holds. We must assess if our offerings are what is needed and then apply metrics to determine the effectiveness of our offerings. This philosophy will keep us in step with the children’s and society’s needs.

**Leverage All Who Can Help** - Ojalá Niños knows the boundaries of its mission. We recognize that those we serve have other needs. Therefore, we are establishing working relationships with other NGOs, government agencies, and individuals who can meet needs we cannot. The days of acting alone are behind us.

**A Culture of Change** - Ojalá Niños has introduced and will maintain a culture of embracing change. The future is uncertain, but that cannot prevent us from moving forward. We will move ahead based on the best available facts. We may need to adjust course from time to time, but this is what leaders must do if they want any chance of success.

The pandemic’s impact will be felt for generations in ways that we can’t imagine. Understanding this fact is key to our continued success. We will continue to prepare the children to assume their rightful place in the local, national and international economies. Every child will be afforded the opportunity to achieve a better life for themselves, their families and their community by being prepared to think critically and act ethically.

**Norman R. Briere**
President of the Board of Directors
Ojalá Niños, A.C.

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Financial Summary

In 2020, we raised $38,654 USD

In 2020, we spent $46,556 USD

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How you can help

International Transference:
Bank of New York Mellon
Branch Address: 1 Wall Street 19th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10005 USA
Beneficiary of the account: Intercam Banco, S.A. Institución de Banca Multiple
Beneficiary Address: Rio Tiber No. 67, Col. Cuauhtemoc, 06500 México, D.F.
Account No: 8901137952
ABA (Routing): 021 000 018 (For Domestic, Transfers, Within the USA)
For further credit to: Ojala Niños A.C. /
002971020019

National Deposit / Transfer
Deposit in Mexican Pesos
Bank: Intercam
Account: 002-97102-001-9
Name: Ojala Niños A.C.

Do you want to deduct taxes?
Donate through San Miguel Community Foundation, a 501.c.3 organization.

Do you want to contact us or know other ways to support?
Write to info@ojala-ninos.org

FOREVER GRATEFUL!

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