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BULLETIN



international
International Programs

YMCA Canada East

Marcala



Marcala in Honduras is west of the capital city, Tegucigalpa. Located in the mountains, the village and surrounding communities are at an altitude high enough that it affects one's ears when driving up from the valley below. The landscape is beautiful; the hills and valleys are bright green. Some of the communities in this area are so isolated that they are cut off from the rest of the region during the rainy season, when the steep dirt roads become impassable for anything other than burros.

In spite of the hills, this is an agricultural region. One passes terraces of coffee, stands of banana trees, sugar cane, small groves of mango and papaya, and field after field of corn with the distinctive purple husk of blue corn planted on hillsides so steep one wonders how they could be cultivated.

Marcala is a fairly small village with a population of around 30,000, including the campesinos from the surrounding countryside. The community is laid out around a central plaza with narrow streets and alleys. The ACJ [YMCA] building is U-shaped with an inner courtyard. Vocational training programs are offered here as well the Citizenship Formation Program, IT courses, and an AIDS prevention program.

Tomás Argueta is the director of this center. In the following pages, he describes how he became involved with the Y and what his work means to him.

For more information, contact Rick McDaniel, International Coordinator, YMCA Canada East
rickmcdaniel@nb.aibn.com,
<http://rickmcdaniel.blogspot.com>
(506) 462-3084



Staff and participants at Marcala YMCA
Tomás Argueta second from left in rear row

Tomás Argueta

My name is Tomás Antonio Argueta Yanes. I am from Marcala in the Department [Province] of La Paz. I started as a health volunteer in my community, Las Tranquitas, and was a member of the local “Patronato” [a church based community action group]. We carried out several projects, among them the construction of a community center and a clean water program.

In 1990, I joined the youth ministry of the Catholic Church, where I became a group coordinator and a member of the board of directors. In 1993, the youth ministry held a meeting at which the YMCA [ACJ] described the work they were doing. A decision was made to coordinate the work of the ACJ and the youth ministry in LaPaz.

During this period, when the YMCA and the church ministry worked together, many more young people in the region became involved.

However, because of the YMCA's status as an international movement with historical ties to the Protestant faith, some Catholic members felt that the relationship was not appropriate. So the YMCA was established locally as an independent entity working in community and agricultural projects, medical services, and youth leadership.

The focus of all YMCA activity is improving the life conditions of young people. One way in which this goal is achieved is through Farmer-to-Farmer exchanges with young people from different areas of the country and other Latin American countries. In this program I was chosen to represent the YMCA of Honduras at a Central American meeting of farmers in Nicaragua and the Regional Central American and the Caribbean meeting held in the city of Havana, Cuba.

I have also acted as group facilitator in workshops to strengthen community volunteers and community workers with young people. I have had the opportunity to gain experience from working with youth in different areas.

In 2005, I started to work with the YMCA's Citizenship Formation Program. It was a challenging program, and the first year our goal was to have 200 young people go through the program. We found participants in different independent

...Tomás Argueta

schools, community groups, as well as independent young people. These young people played an important role in getting the national government to pass legislation guaranteeing that the civil and human rights of youth would be respected in this country. They collected signatures on petitions and encouraged other young people to become active in public demonstrations on behalf of the legislation—including vigils, sit-ins, marches, and lobbying.

The passing of the Youth Law was an important moment in our history. Following it, the YMCA signed pacts with municipal governments as well as with national authorities; these arranged for the implementation of the Citizenship Formation Program in local communities.

With financial support from YMCA Canada East, we have been able to establish centers and workshops in the communities surrounding Marcala, including San José, Santa Elena, Yarula, Santa Maria, and Cabaña and we continue to form new alliances with other communities.

This has been a rewarding process for me. Through my work with the YMCA in Marcala I feel I have contributed to the strengthening of a national youth movement in Honduras. I have had the opportunity to work with young people from different regions of the country. Together we have found ways to help young people in marginalized situations improve their living conditions.



Tomás Argueta (second from right) and the director of the San José de La Paz school with three Citizenship Formation participants



The Honduras Solidarity Blend



The Marcala region has an international reputation for the quality of its coffee.

In order to assist the YMCAs in Canada East raise funds for their participation in the partnership with Honduras, Just Us! Coffee Roasters Coop has brought out a “Honduran Solidarity Blend” coffee.

For this blend, Just Us! imports coffee from the fair trade cooperative, Café Orgánico Marcala. This cooperative helps 143 small producers promote and market their product. Most of the coop members belong to the Lenca ethnic group, the primary Native American community in Honduras.



One manner in which local associations can use the Solidarity Blend to raise funds is to sell the coffee by subscription. Individuals on the subscription list receive an order once month. The subscription list can also include any of the items on the Just Us! product list (which can be found on the Canada East web site). If 35 subscribers purchased two pounds of coffee a month, the association would earn \$245 monthly.

Coffee sales can also be used to raise funds for participation in the 2011 monitoring visit to Honduras.