



HONDURAS: July 18 - 28, 2003: 4,000 Bedkits

BY CLARENCE DEYOUNG
HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA

In Honduras, over 60% of the population live on less than a dollar a day. By sending their children out to work, a parent may increase the family income by another dollar or so and, consequently, families perceive education to be irrelevant to their needs. In fact, many families believe that sending their children out to work is a solution to their economic difficulties. The problem in Honduras is not the lack of enrollment in schools, which is surprisingly high at 90%, but rather it is the drop-out rate. The older the children get, the less they learn and the more they work.

Honduras has one of the highest school drop-out ratios in Latin America. The problem is worst in rural areas where some children only make it to Grade 3 before they start working in the fields with their parents, and so they abandon school completely.

Despite existing policies against child labour in Honduras, where children can legally enter the labour market at 14-years-of-age (but they are expected to go to school until they are 18 years old) in unregulated sectors, children start working at a younger age, and are expected to work 14 to 15 hours a day, thus leaving no time to attend school or to study at home.

According to recent surveys, the conditions of poverty are not improving in Honduras. Reality is, if the economy is not growing, the situation will not improve. Honduras currently has a growth in its gross domestic product of 2%, but a population growth rate of 3%. Social demands are greater than

the government's ability to respond.

Furthermore, the priority of the current government is to pay down the debt, thereby neglecting making investments in schools, health care, housing and other social issues.

HONDURAS BEDKIT 2003

- 1 mattress/cover
- 1 bedsheet
- 1 blanket
- 1 pillow/cover
- 1 towel
- 1 t-shirt
- 1 pair of shorts
- 2 pencils
- 1 pen
- 2 note books
- 1 pencil sharpener
- 1 eraser

Our team was able to visit the home of a child who received a bedkit during our November, 2002 distribution, and one who had just received a bedkit from this current distribution. One home was a two-room wooden house, approximately 300 square feet, with eleven people living in it.

So does your bedkit(s) make a difference to the children of Honduras? You can bet it does! With your continued support, SCAW will be able to continue helping children, not only in this country, but in many other developing countries as well.

On behalf of the 4,000 children of Honduras who received SCAW's [2003] bedkits: "*Gracias, Gracias, Gracias!*"

BY JEAN BENNETT
BAYFIELD, ONTARIO

In 1970, our founder Murray Dryden, and his late wife Margaret, took 50 bedkits to homeless children in India. Murray had been taking pictures of sleeping children as a hobby, and the idea of children having "a good nights sleep", would become the focus of their lives. They, the Dryden's, believed they couldn't change the world, but they could make a difference, one life at a time.

Our distribution of 4,000 bedkits this year in Honduras is the third time I have had the privilege of helping a team put those bedkits into the hands of needy children.

Every time our team arrived at a location where bedkits had been assembled, and we saw a room full from floor to ceiling of rolled up bedkits, my mind always flashed back to Canada because each roll represented someone's thirty dollar donation from back home — donors who make it all happen. I always think, too, of the wonderful volunteers in the SCAW office who open the mail, make up the labels and sort them for each distribution, ready for the travelling volunteers to carry with them so each of you will have a picture of the child who received the bedkit your donation provided. And, also that each of those bedkits represents a picture that a caring volunteer in the SCAW office will mail to each donor, along with a newsletter that is so professionally produced by the volunteers listed below. All this is volunteered time and energy, so SCAW can always maintain the promise that every dollar of donor money indeed

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(Honduras by Jean Bennett, Bayfield, Ontario, continued from page 1)

makes a difference to a needy child.

Honduras, located in the heart of Central America, is very mountainous, and many of its six-million people live on steep hills in very small mud block houses. Civil war in the past, as well as natural disasters, have made life very difficult for many there. We were told the country's main exports, coffee and bananas, were wiped out by Hurricane Mitch five years ago.

Although most people in Honduras are very poor, there are people there who care about the plight of their fellow citizens and are working to make a difference. For example, your donation for this trip, had been entrusted to a Rotary club in Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras. Members of that club bought the bedkit items, assembled them into bags and selected the children who were to receive them.

Each day of our six different distributions, Rotarian volunteers dressed the children in their new clothes, part of the bedkit, and helped in many other ways, while our team made sure we got a good picture for each donor, and put each bedkit into the hands of one of these needy children.

As I write this, I think of a day when I was standing at the end of the line giving out the precious bags, when I bent over to a six year old girl, small for her age—she rose to her tiptoes and kissed me on the cheek. She didn't need to say anything... I got the message.

Another day, when I asked a person to translate what a small girl said when she received her bedkit, I was told she said, "Everything is very good".



We were taken to some homes where a child had been chosen to receive their gift. Mud block walls, earth floor,



cooking area outside on stony ground, and water very scarce. Can you possibly imagine how welcome a bedkit is in that kind of situation?

Mr. Dryden, you can be sure that what you started 33 years ago is continuing to make life feel very good for thousands of children, and it is making a difference, one life at a time.

BY KIM RAPP ETOBICOKE, ONTARIO

I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to be a part of such a beneficial and appreciated project. This was my first distribution trip with SCAW, and I have come back with many unforgettable stories. Truly, the most gratifying aspect of this experience was seeing the smiles and excitement on the children's faces when they saw and received their bedkits.

Our distributions took place in three *barrios* (extremely poor neighbourhoods) in Tegucigalpa, Honduras' capital city. It was quite an eye-opening experience to visit and work in these areas. Narrow, steep, dusty, pothole filled roads lined with small one and two-room houses make up this urban landscape. Electricity and running water are not readily found. We were fortunate to be able to visit a home in each of the three different distribution areas. The first two were homes of this

year's recipients of bedkits, and the third was the home of a boy who received his bedkit on a previous distribution.

We visited one *barrio*, Cannon, where approximately 1,000 houses were built on the mountainside. The houses were a mixture of wood, cinder block and *adobe* (mud), many with corrugated metal roofs and walls, and some with advertising posters for walls. Often the roofs would have rocks and/or pieces of wood lying on top to hold the metal in place during heavy winds. Some families were fortunate enough to afford suitable attachments for their roofs. Many homes were one or two rooms, and often the cooking areas were outside, as were the toilets. There was some water at the bottom of the hill that was used for washing. Aside from that, people here relied on the water truck, which came by once per week. The cost of water is approximately \$1 US for 5 gallons, a high cost for those scrambling for jobs and money (basically a day's pay for most families).

In Cannon, we visited the home of a nine-year-old boy. His family, including his mother and father, two sisters and a brother, lived in a two-room wood house with a corrugated metal roof and one interior wall. The house had no electricity or running water. The family had only two beds, so I'm sure the bedkit the boy received will be highly appreciated. The big smile on his face (see photo) as he showed off his new bed, blankets and clothes for us showed how truly happy he was. As we were leaving, a group of children who had just been dropped off from the distribution came running down the hill, bedkits in hand (or on their backs). I was so overwhelmed to see such happiness and excitement on the faces of these children.

I have so many stories to share about children receiving bedkits...their smiles, "*gracias*," and their hugs and kisses of thanks. One story particularly stands out in my mind as an example of what your donation of a bedkit means to a child.

There was a little boy, Guillermo, (8-years old), who brought his little sister, Jessica to the distribution, as he was looking after her. He limped up to the picture taking area and we questioned why he was limping. He had stepped on a nail sometime earlier, injuring his foot. After he received his bedkit, he was offered medical attention at the school prior to returning home. As I was carrying him up to the medical room, he asked (as I found out through one of our volunteer translators) if he could go home first to give his bedkit to his mother. He was so afraid that his bedkit would be taken away; this weighed more heavily on his mind than the pain in his foot. To try to ease his fears, we made sure his bedkit went with him up to the medical room. Guillermo showed so much appreciation for this simple gift of a bedkit and the opportunity for a good night's rest! This really touched me.



I would like to express my sincere thanks to all who were involved in this distribution: You, our donors; the helpers at the SCAW office; our hosts, the Rotarians and Rotaract members and their families, and, during our stay in Tegucigalpa, the numerous volunteers who assisted with the selection of the children and distribution of bedkits, and finally, the incredible team (Clarence, Jean and Nancy) that I was fortunate to be a part of. Together we have put smiles on the faces of 4,000 Honduran children.

**BY NANCY PURDY
CALGARY, ALBERTA**

Honduras was an amazing experience. After a number of years donating to SCAW, I had the wonderful opportunity of seeing first hand the impact that these bedkits have on the local children. At one of our distributions, families

holding banners gathered to thank us and carried beautiful bouquets of exotic flowers from their gardens. Some of you will see these flowers in the background of your photo. Later, we saw a few of the homes of the recipients' families, which made it very clear that the right children were receiving the bedkits. The children were so pleased with the bedkits. I will never forget the many hugs, kisses and heartfelt "*gracias*" that I received.

However, what struck me most from this trip was the increased understanding I had about the SCAW family, and how it was able to accomplish the distribution of thousands of bedkits while guaranteeing that the donor's \$30 goes directly to purchase of supplies for the children. (Aside: Administrative costs are covered by a separate trust fund set up by Mr. Dryden).

I will start off by saying that my team was wonderful. Little did I know that four people, who first met blurry eyed at the airport at 4:45 am, could work so effectively as a team within a few short days. Clarence and Jean both shared valuable insight and advice gained through their previous distributions with Kim and I (both first timers). However, the volunteer team extended well beyond us! I was fascinated to learn about the many hands that join together to pass each bedkit to a needy child.

There are countless volunteers at the Toronto office (Mr. Dryden's former home) processing donations, generating and sorting labels, recruiting volunteers, collaborating with host country persons, and assembling the necessary equipment (camera, tripod, labels, label holders, etc.) for the travelling volunteers.

This project, like all SCAW projects, was a collaborative effort with an organization in the host country. In Honduras, we worked with two of the Rotary Clubs in Tegucigalpa. Without their assistance, this

project would be absolutely impossible. They were in charge of negotiating the purchase of the items for the bedkits. Unlike India and some other countries with whom SCAW works, Honduras does not have a textile industry. Therefore, it required a concerted effort to negotiate the best price for all of the items in order to complete the bedkit. After the purchase of the items, the bedkits were then fully assembled into plastic bags. Imagine the time that it would take to roll up 4,000 mattresses and bag them with the 11 other items (shirt and shorts are not included in the bag as the children wear these for their photographs)!

Their leadership and hard work didn't end there, they (the Rotarians) were also fabulous hosts who not only picked us up from the airport and drove us to each of the distributions sites, they also provided an army of volunteers each day. Distribution days require numerous volunteers to help check in the children, assist with the changing procedures (hand out new clothes and bag their old clothes for them to take home), help the children to line up, check names as they receive bedkits, act as translators and keep bedkits moving from the storage area to the distribution area.

The Rotarians also involved other groups that were crucial to the success of this project:

1. Their wonderful wives who kept us all going with snacks and lunches.



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2. Don David and Father Patricio who both ran schools in two barrios. Our distribution sites were at their schools, both of which ran in shifts (morning, and afternoon, and Father Patricio even had an evening shift at his school). These men were also instrumental in providing suitable lists of deserving children for the bedkits. Don David knew his community so well that he was able to actually rank his almost 800 students level of "poorness" (extreme, moderate or minor). He used this information in order to determine which families most needed assistance with school costs. Their schools also provided a host of volunteers to assist on distribution days.

3. The Rotoract group (18-30 year olds) were a hard working, enthus-iastic group of volunteers who rounded out the team on distribution days.

The involvement of all of the people above provided us with a wonderful workforce and an amazing opportunity to experience the warmth of the Honduran people. We also learned that Honduras is a country of have and have-nots. What I found amazing is that this project masterly brought these two worlds together. For example, a number of the Rotoracts commented on how much they enjoyed the experience

**NEXT SCHEDULED
DISTRIBUTION TRIPS**

**OCTOBER, 2003 -
BANGLADESH
7,000 BEDKITS**

**JANUARY, 2004 -
MUMBAI, INDIA
6,000 BEDKITS**



SCAW All Occasion Card
Mother & Infant, Chennai,

of working with the kids in the barrios. Without this opportunity, they would never have had the opportunity to be in these neighbourhoods. (How many New Yorkers drive into Harlem willingly?). Long term, I think the bridge built between these worlds will have even further spin-off effects.

The bottom line of all of the SCAW family (donor, Canadian volunteers, Honduran volunteers) is to make a contribution to improving the life of a child. I met a 7 or 8-year-old Down's Syndrome boy on my last day who best illustrated that our mission was accomplished. I'm not sure I can adequately describe his beaming smile or wonderful hug that he spontaneously gave me when I gave him his bedkit. In fact, I was blessed to get that same smile and loving hug from him two more times before leaving that day. He is only one of the 4,000 kids where we did make a contribution to their lives. Gracias to all of you who helped to make it happen!

A BLESSING!

**May the best of your yesterdays be
the worst of your tomorrows!**

Have you purchased your Holiday Greeting cards yet? We have two delightful all occasion cards available one featuring the photo left, a Chennai, India mother with her infant in SCAW's 2003 newly styled cradle; the other is of a group of smiling, happy Ugandan children. These attractive black and white cards measure 4½" x 6¾". We are selling them, tax included, in packages of twelve (12) cards for \$10. Inside, the single greeting PEACE makes it easy for you to utilize this card for any and all occasion. Contact Linda Webb at the SCAW office to order.

The Ugandan photo is not available for this publication, however, we anticipate it will be on our Web site by the time you receive this, so check it out.

We also have our delightful Hasti Note package (drawing of a sleeping baby) available in packages of ten (10) for \$6. (tax included).

**THANK YOU
for your
contribution to this
Honduras trip**

Black's Photography for
photofinishing

**Champion Photochemistry
Limited** for continuously
funding film and photofinishing
costs since 1986.

Konica Canada Inc. for
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**Kay Kelly,
Harry Keating and
Maurice Kowanetz**
for publishing this newsletter

Donors and Volunteers!