

## FRIENDS OF CARITAS CUBANA INC .

### **Our most recent trip to visit Caritas programs**

On November 16, 2009, a fourteen person delegation from Friends of Caritas Cubana visited the Caritas programs that you have been so generous in funding over the years. One of our group, Board Member John Hickey, writes “ *I have now been a visitor to Cuba a number of times, so I am no longer surprised by the warm welcome Cubans extend to their Northern neighbors, the constancy of the music in the air, or the seemingly endless graciousness of the people despite their very limited circumstances. What has come to delight me the most, however, are the surprises – the unscheduled encounters with people and activities that bring an unexpected joy to my heart...what I have come to call the “magical moments”.*”



The magical moments included the visit to a day care center – one of three we help fund in Old Havana, for children of single mothers. Our small but exceptional gifts of toys and books were a hit with the 30 children. We were surprised and delighted to see the children selecting books instead of toys.

We went to a town in rural Havana, where we visited a day program for the elderly. The program is housed in a volunteer’s home and staffed by elderly volunteers. About 15 persons attend from Monday to Friday. They have lunch, sing, read poetry and have each other’s companionship. The oldest member of this group is 92 years old. She walks 5 blocks to the public bus and then more blocks at the other end. On days when the bus doesn’t seem to be running, she walks the whole way. She has never missed a day. Another member is brought by her elderly friends in a wheelchair. Thanks to a refrigerator provided by Caritas, the program supplies “at home” meals for 25 individuals who are too old or sick to attend the program.



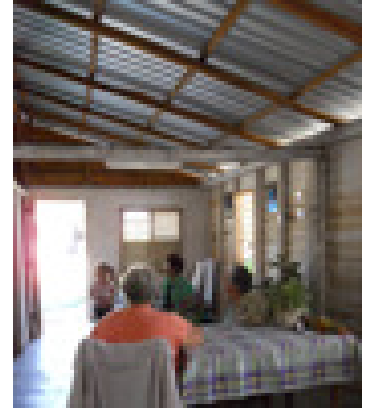
We went to a program in Centro Habana, where persons with Downs syndrome were making Christmas ornaments. They range from ages 16 to 49. The program encourages independence, self-esteem and self-sufficiency. The highlight of this visit was dancing with the group in a conga line. The most interesting aspect was that the parents attend with their children. They serve as volunteers and while there, in a separate space, manufacture goods to sell at fairs that will benefit the program. We saw them making slippers, handbags, dishcloths, pajamas, etc. These parents also learn how to deal with their children’s condition.



We visited two more programs in the Province of Havana. In a town called Managua, about sixty adults take English lessons several times a week, and adults and children take computing lessons. These programs are filled to capacity. In the town of Las Guasimas, a very poor area in the southern part of the province of Havana, we visited an after school theater program. The children performed under the leadership of a young couple who volunteer as their teachers. Friends of Caritas is the sole support of this and another after school program for extremely poor children.

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At Caritas's national offices we saw a film and a slide show, which reported on our efforts to send roofing materials after the 2008 hurricanes. Vicky Keiser and John Hickey then spent the rest of the day visiting Pinar del Rio families who had received roofs that Friends of Caritas Cubana donated. John writes, "*we were invited into cottage after cottage down the unpaved lane by proud and welcoming homeowners to enjoy their hospitality and a cortado – and to see their new roofs.*"



In the town of Trinidad, we had a tour of the church in the Plaza Mayor and visited two programs where women sew, knit and embroider, plus a program for disabled adults and a program for young adults with Downs syndrome who were making beautiful embroidered items. For each of these programs we are helping to provide their work materials: thread, cloth, needlepoint kits, etc.

We come back with great pride in being part of Caritas' effort, seeing how Caritas makes a huge difference in people's lives, but knowing there are so many unmet needs. There is no question that the economic situation in Cuba is extremely difficult and we worry about the vulnerable people Caritas serves.

Over the past 10 years we have seen Caritas Cubana grow in many ways: more persons served, more services provided, new initiatives, many more volunteers. This has been possible thanks to your generosity.

With lots of love and gratitude, we wish you Happy Holidays and welcome any help you can give us now and in the future.

Please visit our website [www.friendsofcaritascubana.org](http://www.friendsofcaritascubana.org)

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