Dear Partners in mission,

We are late in sending this Newsletter, as Gus and I went to Brasil in November, but we wanted to wait to share our experience with you. Then we decided to wait for the Project Coordinator, Isabel’s (Bel) yearly report. Bel, one of my first student’s in Rio, is an amazing woman and is responsible for the development growth of the Association’s successful programs.

We found things much shabbier than we remembered for the city of Rio is in chaos due to the preparations for the World Cup this year and the Olympics in 2016. A fortune is being spent for these preparations financially jeopardizing the necessary health and education improvements.

But in the midst of this we saw the light that these projects bring to this shantytown. These pictures below which I took in November are an example: children doing art work, playing and eating, laughing and singing in a safe place. In the midst of the shabbiness, these children were doing creative art work, painting towels, making hand prints, decorating soap boxes, etc. They were enthusiastic and such a joy to watch. How their lives were being enriched! They were making beautiful things which most of them would not have access to except in a project like this. Some of these children we have known since birth, and tears filled my eyes as I watched, for there are those who have known so much violence at home and on the streets, but are here making beautiful things. Look at their faces! (This was a special art program led by art teachers from the University where Bel is a student, Faculdade Internacional Signorelli.)

But I also learned that money is running out for the program. Since we left donations have dwindled and until the Olympics are over, there is no hope for financial aid in Brasil. The programs have grown but so have the expenses. Our heart aches at the possibility of not being able to keep these programs going. Bel will graduate from college in August, thanks to the generosity of Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Disciples of Christ, and she is President of the dwellers of Jardin do Anil, so she hopes to work toward acquiring a larger space for the program there.

The Course for the Training of Community Health Educators 2013 by Isabel Maria Fernandes da Silva

We began the year, 2013, with the continuation of the 4 Courses for the training of Community Health Educators, and there were 3 graduations with 44 students graduating. We now have 4 teachers, two being ex students. However, 9 new teachers were prepared to take over their own groups in early 2014. There has been a growing increase in the number of persons wanting to take this Course since 2011 because of the many jobs for Community Health Agents being offered by the State Family Health Program. These new health professionals would be part of the staff in Basic Health Programs being financed by Municipal Secretary of Health in Rio de Janeiro.(SMS). In fact there is quite a large number of our ex-students working as community health agents (ACSS) already. Our Association of Community Health Educators (AECS) is proud of the fact that in the 16 years of our existence, we have been able to prepare so many participantes for this program that has changed the lives of so many, principally women who had never been able to continue their studies because of children and family, the customary role for women. The main objective of this Course has always been not only to empower but to encourage further studies, increasing professional opportunities for women. We have the example of the many women who, after graduating from our course, have gone on to further studies becoming health
technicians, nursing assistants, nurses, and teachers. Some of these women hadn’t even completed grammar or high school education when they took our Course. It is very gratifying to have had a part in the empowerment and professional growth of these women.

In 2014, we are making some changes in the duration of the course, shortening it to 12 months because most of students are seeking jobs in the city health system, and 18 months was too long to wait. We will begin 2 new groups, a total of 70 new students, in February in two areas where our Course had never been taught before. Barb: “I had an extremely gratifying experience during my Nov. visit. A bus load of former students from one of my first classes in Rio of this training course, came to see me. Most of them I had not seen since their course ended in 1995. They told me how they had used what they had learned raising their children and now their grandchildren. They also told me how they had used their training in their communities as teachers and health agents.”

Students in class practicing what they are learning / Reading Blood Pressures / How body parts function

Children’s Project

Some of the activities in this program in 2013: Computer training using Word, Windows and Excel; improving reading skills; composition writing, creative writing; planting and caring for a vegetable garden in a reserved area in the community plus nutritional value of vegetables; play writing and theatre; sports.

Community garden: the children plant and care for the garden, giving freely whatever grows. They learn the nutritional value of the vegetables they plant.

Sports: Because of the area in which these children live, and short school hours, children do not have access to a sports program. We are aware of the need for this, not just for recreation but for physical and mental health as well as a relief of normal stress. Good sportsmanship is a skill that will be used all through their lives. Sports are very much a part of Brazilian culture. Competition is something these children will be up against as adults but they must learn to take losses and wins in a healthy way. The volleyball team:
IAGO, age 12, who has been in this program for 3 years, tells his story:

“Hi, my name is Iago! I want everyone to know about the childrens Project, “Desenho E Arte” and that the activities that are offered have been very important for me and my friends, principally because of the new friendships I made. All that we learn in the different activities, we can use in our everyday life. One of the best examples is our community garden program where besides learning to plant and cultivate, we pick and consume what we plant. All of our horticulture plants are cultivated with organic fertilizer that is prepared in our own garden workshop. Because of the reasons this project is so important for me and my friends, we are asking that you continue to help us maintain and improve this project. Thank you, all of you who help us!”

Note from Barb: I need to add that we have known Iago since he was born. I have written about his father, Anderson, who worked with me and proved to be a thief and liar. He brought Iago’s mother to his mother to care for during her pregnancy, than had to flee, for his life had been threatened by one of the gangs he had stolen from. Iago’s mother also disappeared, leaving the grandparents to care for Iago. His prospects were not good, but this program changed him, and we believe, his future. He is a big, awkward boy but, like his father, very intelligent. We have seen such positive change in him since he came to our children’s program.
Amanda, age 12, has been in this program for 3 years:

“Hello, my name is Amanda. I entered this program, Desenho e Arte, in 2012. In the program we have excellent teachings. We learn how to preserve the environment, we learn how to use the computer, something so important for our school work; we participate in a Horticulture Club, and we learn the value of growing our own vegetables. We even learn how to prepare our own fertilizers, etc. We learn how to play volleyball, and we had the thrill of outings—we went to the movies and to the museum, Anima Mundi. We celebrated Easter, Children’s day, Christmas holidays with special programs. And for us, it is wonderful to participate in this project. Where else would we have such opportunities? It would be very sad if this project were to end, for this reason, we hope that the wonderful persons who have supported us will continue to do so. You can be sure that you are all doing so much good for us who participate in the project as well as future participants. I thank all of you from the bottom of my heart!”

Recreation Activities in 2013

These are done in the space that we have and include: creative art including theater, educational games, creating and illustrating stories with special themes, cartoons, sports, and special trips outside of the shantytown, festive celebrations of holidays, birthdays, and special events. A light lunch is also supplied. For many children, it is the only meal they will get since leaving home. Teachers and sometimes parents who are not working help. Also some students and teachers of the University, Faculdade Internacional Signorelli, where the Coordinator of the project, Isabel, studies. This University has a partnership with our Association. We think this can be an example of what other schools and universities can cooperate with us and our programs. Our program is growing, and we know there is much more we can do as well as increase the amount of children we can take, but we would have to find a larger space to work in, and that is a future goal. We believe not only are we keeping children off the streets, but we are changing lives!

Annual Financial report for the Association’s projects in 2013

Desenho e Arte--Children’s project: teachers, coordinator, maintenance of space used, lunch, teaching material, and outings: approx. 1,830.00 Reais/month (US $770).

Course for the training of Community Health Educators: teachers, maintenance of copy machine plus paper and administration of project: approx. 1,600 Reais/month (US $670).

In 2014, we will hope to have the finances to continue our projects as well as add new ones that we feel would add to our objectives.

Bel's salary and her two assistants, plus the required Govt. taxes on their salaries: Bel: approx. 3,200 Reais/month (US $1360) and her two assistants: approx. 1,200 Reais/month (US $500)

We would like to send our sincere thanks to you, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Isabel Maria Fernandes da Silva
Coordenação dos projetos da AECS

Marivani Pereira de Aquino
Presidente da AECS

Physical Therapy: The physical therapy program continues to be financed by the Organization which rents our building and attends an average of 100 patients per month. Because there is no other such program for lower income patients, there is currently a waiting list of 30 persons.

Lea, Renata and Vanessa, the Physical Therapists

“What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of (we humans). That is what love looks like.” --Saint Augustine. We are all God's hands in the mission of love as expressed in the struggle for peace and justice through education which empowers others to make changes. Thank you, Barb and Gus.