

Getting Kids Uniforms So They Can Go to School

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A year before Kathy Adams moved to Costa Rica from Arizona to work as a field service engineer for Intel, a friend had told her about the plight of street children here. Despite her friend's warning that there were too many kids for her to have an impact, she was determined to get involved somehow and help in whatever way she could.

When Adams, 38, arrived in Costa Rica six years ago, she promptly began studying Spanish and roaming the streets with her friend Socorro Incer, a 26-year-old from Nicaragua, to talk to kids about why they were working as street vendors selling vegetables, instead of attending school.

She found that the root of the problem was that most of the children had families, but couldn't afford the required materials, books, shoes and uniforms to attend school. They were forced to work to help their families instead.

ADAMS decided to start raising money and working with the families to get these children into school. For six years, she has been raising money for school supplies and uniforms and working to get about 90 kids in two communities in the Central Valley province of Alajuela, Precario de Los Angeles and Rincón de Cacao, into school and is working to expand into a third community.

She also has created a Costa Rican non-profit organization, Fundación La Fuerza Unida, to keep her work going, and said she has seen very positive results.

"It makes me so proud to see the kids' enthusiasm as they show me their notebooks and report cards," she said.

Adams struggled in the beginning, but is happy with how the organization is doing.

ALTHOUGH she moved to the United States two years ago, the project is ongoing, and has become even more difficult by the fact that she does not live here, and can only visit the kids a few times a year.

"It has become a soul-driven passion for me; I see these kids now as my kids," she said. "I have promised them that I will return each year to get them in school, and



Courtesy Kathy Adams

KIDS wearing uniform means they can go to school. Empowerment International helps them get there.

that I will not abandon them."

Adams is pleased with the financial support her organization has received for the children.

Fuerza Unida recently incorporated under the name of Empowerment International. She had originally hoped to

start up a business from which she could donate a portion of the proceeds, but due to the U.S. economy has set that plan aside and recently left her job to establish a U.S. based nonprofit through which to fund the organization in Costa Rica. Her goal is to expand the organization throughout Central America.

Fuerza Unida currently works with 35 families to provide school supplies and uniforms as well as medical care and has 53 children enrolled in school.

The cost of helping a child attend school for one year is \$75 and Adams is desperately seeking financial help.

If you are interested in helping, e-mail her at KathyAdams@yahoo.com.

Donations can also be made at *Banco De Costa Rica*, account 001-227120-6. For more information on Empowerment International, go to www.empowermentinternational.org.

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