Program: Mujeres Aliadas

Website: www.mujeresaliadas.org

Mission: Mujeres Aliadas advances the lives of poor women and adolescent girls in the Lake Pátzcuaro area of Michoacán, México, through the provision of health and educational services in partnership with the community and in a manner that enhances the dignity of women, with an emphasis on an integration of traditional and occidental health and educational modalities.

History of the Organization: Mujeres Aliadas was formed as a result of the voiced needs of the women in the Lake Pátzcuaro area for an organization that promotes the health and defends the rights of the women and girls in the area. The founders represent a diverse group of women, including local mestizo (indigenous women) a sociologist from Mexico City, and a midwife and educator from Chicago. They work in partnership with local advisory groups and a public health professional/epidemiologist. The team of Mujeres Aliadas worked in the communities for three years, listening to the women, prior to officially incorporating recently as a Mexican nongovernmental organization (NGO).

Where They Work: Lake Pátzcuaro area of Michoacán, México

After consulting local community leaders and women, Mujeres Aliadas selected 35 communities from the five municipios, with an equal division between what are considered to be Purépecha and mestizo communities. Below is a map of the communities around the Lake Pátzcuaro area:
About the Region: Michoacán, Mexico’s third poorest state, is located in Western Mexico. Michoacán has about 5 million inhabitants and is approximately the size of Austria. The origin of the state’s name is thought to be the native word “Mechoacan,” which means “place of the fishermen,” referring to those who fish on Lake Pátzcuaro. Pátzcuaro means “city of stones” in the Purepecha language. Pátzcuaro is high in the mountains of Michoacán at 7,130 feet of elevation.

The tourist industry in the area owes much of its success to butterflies. “Every year between the months of October and March, approximately 20 million monarch butterflies migrate to Michoacán from all over North America, traveling up to 1,864 miles to spend the winter in the mountains.”

The monarchs cover so many surfaces that the color of the forest appears to change from green to orange and black, a phenomenon that attracts tourists from all over the world.

Residents and tourists enjoy Michoacán’s festive Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration (November 1), a holiday with ancient Aztec and Mesoamerican roots that remembers and honors the lives of the deceased while celebrating the continuation of life. Tourists are also drawn to the Paricutin volcano, active until 1943. “Birders” from all over the world visit to watch the area’s vast variety of birds.

Michoacán has abundant natural beauty and resources, and it is considered to be one of the most biological diverse regions in the world (Greenpeace 2008), but many of its residents suffer from tremendous poverty. As Mujeres Aliadas points out:

- The area has a substantial indigenous population, as reflected in the percent of the population that speaks the local indigenous language of Purépecha.
- The vast majority of people from all municipios lack health insurance.
- Illiteracy rates are relatively high, averaging 13% of the population.
- The rate of maternal mortality in the Pátzcuaro area is 103 deaths per 100,000 live births. (In comparison, the United States’ rate for 2005 was 15 deaths.)

History of the region: Michoacán was once a prosperous pre-Columbian kingdom before the Spanish arrived. (The Purhépechans had for hundreds of years resisted Aztec domination, only to be colonized under the Spanish crown in 1522.) The tribe lacked a written language; consequently, “much of their origin and early history are unknown. Tribal stories, legends and customs were passed down through oral traditions, many of which have been lost.”

The Spanish introduced the indigenous communities to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, which had a lasting impact: According to the 2000 census, 83% of the population, or 3.3 million people, are Roman Catholic.

Local natives believe Lake Pátzcuaro represents the thinnest point in the barrier that separates life and death.
Unfortunately, the Spaniards brought diseases, such as smallpox, which decimated the Purhépecha population.

There followed three centuries of colonization; independence from Spain was not achieved until 1821. Mexican president Porfirio Díaz (1830–1915), a controversial figure in history, initiated the rule known as paz porfiriana, which brought internal stability through repression but was brought to an end by the Mexican Revolution of 1910. (The revolutionaries fought for land reform and rights for peasants, and produced the Mexican Constitution of 1917.) In 1934, a native of Michoacán, one of the most important 20th-century Mexican figures, Lázaro Cárdenas (1895–1970), became president. Cárdenas is considered by many to be the father of modern Mexico. He adopted land reforms and gave millions of peasants the right to farm on shared lands, and nationalized the oil companies, which “provided the government with money for education, health care, and public services.” --www.nationsencyclopedia.com/mexico/Michoacan-Zacatecas/Michoacan.html.

Today, Michoacán is a poor municipality in a country that struggles with poverty: Mexico is the eleventh most populated nation on earth (with a population of 112,322,000), has the 12th largest economy in the world, and is the 8th largest exporter of goods and services worldwide, and yet nearly half of Mexico’s citizens--47%--are impoverished. While a great deal of the population in Michoacán relies on the agricultural and cattle and fishing industries to provide employment and food, the state suffers “serious problems regarding over-pasturage, shortage of food supplies, and erosion taking place on the grazing lands, not to mention the many wooded areas that lie now deforested and rendered useless.” (Explorando Mexico)

The illiteracy level in Michoacán is 47 per cent higher than the Mexican national average. In Michoacán, the average schooling level of the population over 15 years of age is only 6.9 years (not quite seventh grade); 13% are illiterate; 20% never finished primary school; and only 6% finish college. An additional factor in Mexico that keeps people in poverty is the lack of entitlement to health services (Explorando Mexico). In Michoacán, women’s healthcare is especially lacking--the maternal and infant mortality rates are shockingly high.

The Project: Dining for Women’s donations will help fund a rural midwife project at a women’s clinic in one of the indigenous villages Mujeres Aliadas serves. The clinic will provide comprehensive women’s health services to all low-risk women.
Specifically, DFW’s funds will provide the necessary support for the **professional midwives and their basic equipment to begin caring for the women** while contracts with governmental agencies are pending. DFW’s funds are critical to begin showing the women and agencies a new modality of care. Services will be provided by professional and nurse midwives under the philosophy of patient-centered care. The goal of the project is to ensure its sustainability— it will open and initially run through DFW’s donations as well as donations from foundations and private funders. However, the plan is for the Mexican Ministry of Health to become a financial partner in the endeavor in order to “demonstrate and evaluate the program to encourage a **paradigm change toward a more humanistic approach to women’s health, one that can be replicated throughout México** and thereby increase the number of women served” (Mujeres Aliadas). Women and girls from within the community will be integrated into daily operations such as training to provide health education and empowerment workshops to their peers and a teen program, and there will also be a village board for the clinic for financial sustainability.

**Project Budget:** Mujeres Aliadas is requesting $41,350 to support the rural midwife project at a clinic for **one year**. **Any donations over that amount will go toward medical equipment, clinic remodeling, transportation and patient support.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Category</th>
<th>Total Cost for One Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaries &amp; Benefits: Nurse (.5 FTE), Nurse Midwife (.75 FTE), Professional Midwife (1 FTE)</td>
<td>$34,050</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies &amp; Utilities (medication, exam room, lab, education)</td>
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<td>Duplication &amp; mailing of DVDs</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL PROJECT COST</strong></td>
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<td>Equipment: exam table, fetal monitor</td>
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<td>Clinic remodeling</td>
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<td>Transportation &amp; Patient Support (including medical fund for those who can’t pay)</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL REQUESTED</strong></td>
<td><strong>$50,730</strong></td>
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How They Measure Success: Mujeres Aliadas will measure success by volume, satisfaction and clinical outcomes (maternal/infant mortality/morbidity, number of women who come for preventive care and follow up with abnormal finding).

Partnerships and formal commitments from governmental health care organizations will indicate success and sustainability.

Additional third-party feedback will be provided by Seguro Popular and the Instituto Nacional de Salud Publica, who will evaluate the program.

Financial Profile: Mujeres Aliadas only recently incorporated in Mexico. The Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition, a 501c3, is fiscal agent and sponsor. Mujeres Aliadas has an interim board made up of Brenda Madura (Executive Director) and local women. A process is in place to finalize the board. Mujeres Aliadas has five staff members (Executive Director, Assistant Director, Nurse Midwife/Instructor, and two community coordinators). Mujeres Aliadas has a current operating budget of about $180,000.

The organization has received $86,500 from the Boeing Foundation for 2009 start-up activities, including community outreach work. In addition, they received $5,600 from individual, private donations, $75,000 in funding from the Boeing Foundation for 2010 to expand the community work and the opening of a clinic and birth center, and $140,000 from an anonymous private foundation to open the nurse midwife school, including operations for one year, and to build a two-room birthing center.

Sources:
1. http://www.history.com/topics/michoacan

Explorando Mexico
United Nations Commission on Human Rights
Unless otherwise noted, photographs provided by Mujeres Aliadas

--- Changing the world one dinner at a time

Teenage girls in line in Codenboro