

The Venezuela Project

Submitted by Henrietta Haines
hadrian@rofin.com.au

To: Osanna@osannavaughn.com and

About me

I have been a Subud member for nearly 46 years. I was opened in Marin County California. I am a helper and have served as a National Helper for Subud USA. On the Committee side over the years I have often served as treasurer.

I am currently the Executive Director for the Subud California Region which is a separately incorporated Non-Profit Corporation. I hold an MBA degree (Masters of Business Administration.) I have started and sold several businesses including Whole Foods Magazine. Developing this magazine began my interest in societal food issues.

Last year my local group in Walnut Creek opened a woman from Venezuela. Her parents had hosted Bapak and Prio in Caracas in the early days. Since that time Latihan has been held in her family's home, but she had never been opened. She told us about the extreme food shortages in Venezuela and that our Brothers and Sisters were going hungry.

First Steps - The Beginning

I was deeply moved. I began collecting funds to buy food to ship to our members in Caracas and the outlying areas. At first the donation were just from my local group but the project grew to other groups and then throughout California and then the Country and now even outside the country are donating.

My goals were basic:

- Send as many quality calories as I could.
- Choose foods that would form complete plant proteins.
- Send food for each and every member of our member's families.
- No administrative charges and keep transportation costs as low as possible.

It was a simple plan and it worked. Our first shipment was sent in June 2017 and our latest shipment - the fifth - was sent May 2018. The basis for each shipment is Black Beans and Rice. We send Corn Meal which acts to complete the protein profile and is traditional in Venezuelan meals. Additionally we send Lentils which are a high quality staple also high in protein. (and Chocolate at Christmas)

Unexpected Consequences.

The members of Venezuela must have been feeling very isolated because I was told that they were surprised that anyone knew or cared about their plight. Some must have been very scared because when the food arrived I am told that they began to cry. I didn't know how deeply this would affect them and they did not know how deeply it was affecting us.

Now a year later the Caracas members have begun to blossom. They are reaching out to other groups who help those in need. They had saved food that was meant for families who had already been forced to immigrate. Their intention is to share food with people outside the Subud community. They have to-date contacted 6 other charities. The influence of Subud in Venezuela is growing there for the first time in decades.

An Even Greater Possibility Developed

As the result of my presentation at the USA National Congress I was contacted by one of our members who is a member of the Rotary Club, an International organization of business and community leaders. He told me that Rotary has a special interest in food programs. He also told me a story, not of food but of the impact Rotary has had on world health. He said that Rotary has been working to eliminate polio for decades and that currently there are only 2 known cases left in the whole world.

He has offered to work with us to sponsor our program. The recognition of Rotary would be a game changer. Both the skills and legitimacy that they can share with us could grow Subud SD's influence and stature. He said that at this time they have a 1 ½ Billion dollars available for projects.

If we work with such a partner who has that sort of outreach and experience, we in Subud can multiply our own impact. We have a worldwide organization and as we develop new skills and partnership connections we increase the effectiveness and scope of our humanitarian projects and the influence of Subud.

Where We Are Going

Food help is needed worldwide and much more will be needed in the future. As climates warm more countries and peoples will develop food duress. One way to provide help will be to expand food growing skills in communities and individual families. Every family who can provide its own food will increase its own health and stability.

An example of this kind of program is SD USA's Kitchen Garden Project in India. SD supports a program which teaches school children and their families how to grow fresh vegetables on small parcels of land in schools and in the yards of their family homes. The Kitchen Garden Project is now estimated to have reached 7,000 people in just the 3 years that it has been supported by SD USA.

In the US, The Institute of Urban Homesteading has also shown this approach to be a practical way to provide food for entire families using the small yards that surround urban homes. Alice Waters the Famous chef of Chez Panise began a program that raises food and chickens in a Berkeley, California school yard. The program has spread throughout the US. And in New York urban farmers are using the roofs of their apartment houses to grow food.

To this end the Food Project has begun to encourage urban farming in Caracas. We have sent seeds and container gardening information in our last shipment. This is the beginning of our supporting their skill, growth and confidence in food production. I have also contacted SD USA to see how we might combine their expertise to help our Sisters and Brothers in Venezuela be their own source of food. Our aim is to help them become teachers for others in Venezuela.

This is a vision of the future which is large enough and sound enough to attract funding from the Rotary Club. Ending hunger in our lifetime is no less impossible than the vision of ending polio. It can be done. I wonder if Bapak may have pointed the way by developing his own small farm.

In the Meantime

As we create capacity here in the US and in Venezuela we will also continue to support our Brothers and Sisters with food shipments. We are continuing to receive funds from both members and SD USA. With a grant from SESI we can escalate the processes of collaboration and skill development.

Legal Structure

The Venezuela Food Project is a Subud California Board of Directors authorized program. It falls under the umbrella of Subud California a Nonprofit Corporation. All funds reside in the Bank of America and are administered by Mashuri Warren and Henrietta Haines. The account is part of the family of Subud California corporate accounts. Currently the administration of this project is handled by volunteers. This is sustainable because we are economically and emotionally capable of volunteering. All office expenses are covered by Subud California.