

## Club Supports Orphanage in El Salvador

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### **Christian Home for Children Provides Support and Care for Destitute Children in San Salvador, El Salvador**

The Rotary Club of Kelowna Sunrise and individual members from the club have been making a significant difference in the lives of children in El Salvador by supporting the work of Helen Griffin, a local humanitarian, who has been in El Salvador setting up and maintaining an orphanage since 1991.



Helen's commitment to do something to enable destitute children to have a home, care and love, took seed after her first visit for three months to El Salvador during the fall of 1989. It was during this time that the guerillas decided to try to overtake San Salvador where Helen was staying. In November the civil war reached its peak. The guerillas were eventually defeated but the peace treaty was not signed until February of 1992. During the conflict in November, Helen was involved with bagging up food packages, which were transported in a very old pickup by three enterprising young men across army and guerillas lines to an area where Christians lived. This action enabled these people to receive basic foods and also provided a means for those who needed medical attention or a safe place to be moved elsewhere where these needs could be met. This was indeed a very different world from what Helen had taken for granted in Canada. Helen saw a lot of awful sights and heard bombing and shelling close by during this time, but

God gave her peace in her heart and she knew that although this time was just for three months, she would return.

Helen returned on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 1991, after working hard to assemble all of the appliances and other equipment and supplies that she would need to set up an orphanage. Upon her arrival in El Salvador, Helen quickly focused on learning the Spanish language while she helped teach in the San Salvador Christian Academy. Shortly after she rented a house which with the help of the Sawords, a missionary couple that had been in El Salvador for many years, was transformed into an orphanage. While Helen was set up with the full knowledge of the Protection of Minors, it wasn't until 1996 that all of the paper work went through and the orphanage had legal papers from the government.

From 1996 until the present, her work has been to establish a permanent home for children. Many of these children have now have been with her for 9 to 17 years. Others have been temporarily placed in the home for a period of two or three months, or even one or two years, depending on their family circle situations.

Helen points out that there are so many more needy children here in El Salvador that the government homes are bursting at the seams. She adds that the problem is no longer a civil war. Instead it is poverty and gangs that are causing many problems and leaving children without families or homes.

Over the years, the Kelowna Sunrise Rotary Club has assisted in financing the school fees for the children. During the 2008-09 Rotary year, the Kelowna Sunrise Rotary club undertook a joint project with the Rotary Club of Santa Tecla in San Salvador to replace the original household appliances. At the same time and through the same project, new computers were supplied and repairs were made to the van and bus. Funding was supplied by a Matching Grant from District 5060 and the Rotary Foundation. This project provided a much needed boost to the children and the orphanage.