

## Hogar Infantil Orphanage and RV/Camping Park

### Â Breaking the Cycle of Poverty through EducationÂ and Camping?

*Dorothy and Bill Bell have been traveling throughout Mexico for the past 10 months in a 28foot Class C Motor home. They are currently traveling with their two teenagers, Adam and Dylan and 24 year old daughter, Justine. They visited an extraordinary RV and Camping park in Chiapas MexicoÂ orphanage. You can visit their website at [www.ontheroadin.com](http://www.ontheroadin.com)*

(PRWEB) July 10, 2004 -- By Dorothy Bell

Photography by Bill Bell Can be viewed at [www.ontheroadin.com](http://www.ontheroadin.com)

Â Why do we want to camp in an Orphanage Mom?Â says Adam my eldest son. Â Do they have A/C?

We continued our drive down highway 190 from San Cristobal de Las Casas to Tuxtla Gutierrez the capital city of Chiapas Â the poorest state in MÃ©xico - as Adam continues to argue against this stop.

Hogar Infantil was founded by American Nich Anderson, who with other foreign tourists fed street kids in 1963. Originally designed as a boyÂs shelter, the home has grown to accommodate both boys and girls between 12 - 18, providing shelter, food, clothing, medical care, and education. Four decades later, the non-profit society has housed and fed thousands of young Mexicans and helped them develop work skills or given them the opportunity for a post-secondary education.

The home is located on a ranch near the small town of Ocozocoautla, in the southern State of Chiapas only 21 miles (34 km) from Tuxtla Gutierrez. There are a number of small buildings that cluster together that with a houseparent, house 12 Â 17 young Mexicans. Currently Hogar is home to 60 or 70 young people and will increase to over 100 by the time the school year begins.

We pull up the driveway to the main cluster of buildings. Three young girls approximately 12 years old run and scurry to the side of our vehicle playing tag with each other. We see other kids playing in the field Â some dangling upside down on swing sets. Others, older teens, congregate towards the rec-room area.

As soon as our engine stops we are greeted by a young man in his late teens. Â These are the noisy spots,Â he explains. Â If you want more quiet you go there.Â

Â We want the noisy spot momÂ said our daughter Dylan looking at the group of teenagers her age nearby. Â This will do fine.Â

Hogar Infantil developed the RV spots so that people could visit and then hopefully support the home. It has worked well. Many Campers say that the visit was one of the most rewarding stops on their journey. It has become so popular that the stay is limited to five days unless special permission is given by the director. The two ÂnoisyÂ spots have water and electricity. The four sites on the play field also have a grey water drain. Larger groups can be accommodated but advance notice would be appreciated. A restroom is available with hot showers.



You can expect the kids to approach you easily. Some are shy and others just want to try out their English skills. They seem to smile more than kids back home.

Hogar says that payment for staying at this campground is neither expected nor allowed. That is true, but some people leave a donation with the Director. However, it is preferred that if you do feel like giving support, you do so through the funding agency in the U.S. This is Hogar Infantil, Inc (a U.S. Non-Profit Corporation with no paid employees).

We decided to do the latter option.

(Contact Bob Herlocker at [bobnpeg@pocketmail.com](mailto:bobnpeg@pocketmail.com) for more info regarding RV and camping spots.

Justine, our eldest daughter has worked with the disadvantaged in both India and Canada. The younger children gravitate to her as she writes in her journal outside on the table. They chatter quickly and quietly in Spanish as if they are telling girl secrets together. Later as she goes for a walk up the hill, a trail of kids follow behind, laughing and racing as they pass through the field's long grasses. The Pied Piper of Hogar.

Adam has taken out his American football and sends long passes to a Mexican boy far down the field. He's a natural, says Adam as he throws again, this time more challenging than the last. Soon he has a team of kids tackling and running with him.

Hogar's kids devour a ton of corn tortillas and 240 pounds of dried beans in a typical month. Education costs for public school and college are very inexpensive compared to Canada or the US but with a population hovering around 100, the education budget exceeds \$20,000 annually.

Breaking the cycle of poverty through education has worked for many of the graduates. Many now lead productive supportive lives and have become lawyers, doctors, teachers and engineers.

The Director, Carlos Macias is a graduate of Hogar himself. He currently teaches at the local school during the day and is the Director of the facility after school. He has a family of his own now; a wife and two children.

There is a group of kids on the pavement near the rec-room area working with Carlos. Wrenches and screwdrivers neatly put into tool pockets line the retaining wall. They are busy assembling a new portable basketball hoop.

Ron Speck, a volunteer of the Board of Director from Salem Oregon explains that a young American was so impressed with the home that he went home and raised over \$700 for tools for the orphanage. The leftover money was used to buy the basketball hoop. We have a proper basketball court, explained Ron. But this hoopone can be raised and lowered for smaller kids.

I look out the screen door of my RV at 9:30. It is dark but I can see the teenagers congregate at the rec centre some 30 feet from my door. Music is playing but it is not as noisy as I was warned. Some of the kids dance. Others talk in groups of two and three's. A young boy starts to dance solo on the pavement. He is good, swirling and turning quickly like Michael Jackson. Everyone is clapping now. Adam falls to the pavement for his dance solo and begins to do the worm to the amazement of the crowd. Everyone laughs into the evening.



Our kids want to stay. "Just one more day Mom. One more day. Please!"

We have to move on, but we catch Adam packing up a bag of his cloths to leave one of his new found amigos "I need these more than I do," he says.

#### Driving to Hogar

The campground is located near the west end of the bypass that passes south of Ocozocoautla. Take the road into town from here, you'll see grain storage silos nearby. You will pass a cemetery on the right and at .5 miles (.8 km), just before the bus terminal on the left, turn left. Drive .4 miles (.7 km) down the road; you'll see the Hogar Infantil entrance on the right.

#### What RVers Can Do

##### Donation

Well cash is King. Instead of giving money to street kids or buying goofy things that you really don't need, consider giving to a well run agency that has a track record for providing education and an opportunity to escape poverty for many young people. Every dollar goes a long way.

##### Items

If you are coming to the area, bring down some of the following items. Used clean items are welcome.

Clothes

Shoes

Flat sheets

Pillows

School supplies

Sports equipment (soccer shoes, basketballs, baseballs etc)

Computer equipment

Electronic entertainment

(A visit to the dollar store at home can get a lot for the money. Colorful pencils, underwear, shampoos are all available at great prices. Consider what a teenager at home would like. \$20 would buy a lot. \$50 would be like Christmas)

#### Volunteer Opportunities

Probably one of the biggest gifts you can give is the gift of you. What are your skills? Could you fix a computer? Teach some young girls how to sew? Help a graduate construct a small home? Help with the electricity or plumbing. The list is endless.

If you have the time and want to volunteer, write

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