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Chicabrava: Empowering young girls through learning to surf

To be a girl in the developing world is an additional hurdle to overcome. Not only will you likely be poor, you will also likely be married young, uneducated, physically and sexually abused and lack the potential to follow your dreams of having a better life.

What if we could change this vicious path and instead give young women an opportunity to thrive, to be inspired and to follow their dreams?

This is the inspiration behind *Chicabrava's Camp Bella* and *Chicas Adelante*. To break the mold of gender equality by offering young women and girls hope. Hope to dream. Hope to change their destiny and hope for a better future.

Houston-native Ashley Blaylock moved to San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua in 2003 when it was an undiscovered fishing village. She had fallen in love with the country and wanted to follow her dreams of starting up the very first all-women's surf camp in Nicaragua. At the time, no women surfed yet Ashley persevered. Over time she developed strong ties and acceptance within the local machismo community and opened the doors to Chicabrava in 2008. By working with the community, Ashley helped transform the cultural belief that surfing was only for men and party goers. On the contrary, Chicabrava broke gender roles by demonstrating that surfing is a



The women of Chicabrava Photo credit: Chicabrava

serious sport that women can enjoy and feel empowered. Over the years, Chicabrava flourished and grew. Ashley was able to hire a full time, all women staff of surf instructors and personnel, and opened up the doors of the Chicabrava Surf Camp. More and more women were coming to Chicabrava to learn to surf and were leaving empowered. It was a beautiful thing. It was around this time that Ashley and a close friend named Sarah Powers came up with the inspiration of taking the mission of Chicabrava – **“empowering women, one wave at a time”** – one step further. *Why not extend this opportunity of empowerment to women who truly need it but can’t access it?*

In 2012, Chicabrava launched **Camp Bella**, a week-long charitable learn to surf and women’s empowerment camp for women survivors of sex trafficking. Ashley and Sarah raised funds to bring a small group of women from Managua to San Juan del Sur where for a week of their life, they got to experience an incredible gift. They learned that they could do anything they set their minds to. Many of the

women had never been in the water before and didn't know how to swim. With life jackets and women coaches, they overcame their fears and learned to surf. It was an amazing, empowering experience for many of these women who had experienced unimaginable trauma.

But the hard reality was that this one week experience was only a drop in the bucket on improving their lives. Sex trafficking is an enormous, highly political problem in Nicaragua and despite efforts it is hard to escape. Per Ashley, the biggest success of running the camp was in raising awareness both locally and abroad of the issue of sex trafficking. Meeting these young survivors also helped the local community gain a different understanding of the sex trade and the terrible impact it has on girls and women.

Ashley ran Camp Bella for three years for survivors of sex trafficking but changed course last year by focusing on helping girls within her own community of San Juan del Sur. Working with a local school, *Escuela Adelante*, Ashley started up a new program for underprivileged girls called “*Chicas Adelante*” which translates roughly into “Go for it girls”. The motto of the program is “Si se puede” or “yes you can”.

Chicas Adelante is a monthly empowerment program for girls ages 8-11 that is based on developing leadership skills, female empowerment, friendship and mutual support. The women staff at Chicabrava voluntarily run the program that meets once a month on Saturdays and culminates in attending Camp Bella for a week.

The star of the program and inspiration behind it is Elsi Marin, one of the first and only local Nicaraguan women to learn to surf and follow her dreams to become a representative of Nicaragua's National Surf Team for 2006-2009. Elsi's experience working at Chicabrava changed her life. Instead of marrying before 20 and

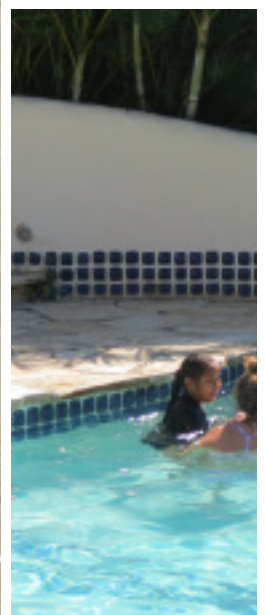
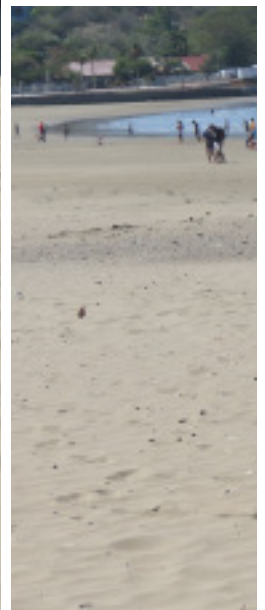
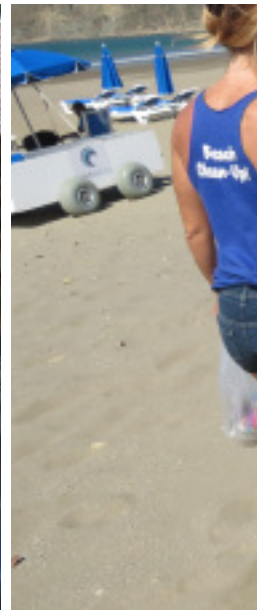


living a life of poverty and abuse which is common to women within the community, Elsi followed her dreams of surfing and went on to become a champion surfer and lead instructor at Chicabrava. Ashley's eyes welled up with tears when she told me how much Elsi's experience moved her. Ashley wants to use Elsi as an example of how you can break cultural, gender and socio-economic barriers and change lives.



Elsi riding a wave

Chicabrava just hosted their first Camp Bella for Chicas Adelante in February. The week was filled with laughter, excitement, friendship and empowerment. Not only did the girls learn to swim and surf, they also got to hear from powerful women leaders within the community, learn to cook, go hiking and horseback riding, and keep a journal about their experience.





For Ashley, it was very important that the girls were not viewed as a charity case. Therefore, she also included a community service and volunteer work within the camp. One day the girls went to help out Chicabrava with their monthly beach cleanup, and another day the girls met with children even less fortunate than themselves. Each girl left feeling even more inspired and empowered. They realized that it doesn't matter what they came from, if they set their mind and heart to it, they can do anything.



The girls of Chicas Adelante Camp Bella



Here is a short video clip on Camp Bella. It is beautiful.





CHICABRAVA Camp Bella: Each year, we host a charitable surf camp empowerment program for underprivileged young women in Nicaragua. In previous years, we focused exclusively on aiding in the rehabilitation of victims of human trafficking. In 2015, we expanded our outreach program to include a broader mission of combatting cultural gender inequality in Nicaragua and overcoming the negative effects of


generations of gender oppression, particularly in the domestic setting. This year, we are focusing on our local community and excitedly welcome you to get involved as we change the lives of 13 young women from San Juan del Sur.


Empowering Girls. One Wave at a Time.


To learn more about Chicabrava click here.


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by thirdeyemom on April 1, 2016

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17 COMMENTS



lensandpensbysally

An inspiration for everyone...

APRIL 1, 2016 AT 9:19 AM



thirdeyemom

Yes indeed Sally! I love what they do!

APRIL 2, 2016 AT 12:38 PM



Sue Slaght

Now this is a creative way to influence young women! A wonderful initiative an I wish them endless success. Did you enjoy the week Nicole?

APRIL 1, 2016 AT 4:39 PM



thirdeyemom

Yes it is fantastic as despite living next to the ocean most girls don't know how to swim! It was a wonderful experience Sue. Very inspiring!

APRIL 2, 2016 AT 12:43 PM



lexklein

Great story! I would really love to go myself some day, but I love the outreach even more.

APRIL 2, 2016 AT 9:06 AM



thirdeyemom

It is amazing Lexi!

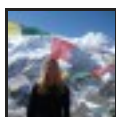
APRIL 2, 2016 AT 12:45 PM



Tish Farrell

Wonderful – letting girls know they CAN!

APRIL 2, 2016 AT 10:25 AM



thirdeyemom

Yes so empowering! 😊

APRIL 2, 2016 AT 12:46 PM



Rewired and Retired in Nicaragua

This is fantastic. I never knew this existed before you came to Nicaragua. I am definitely going to go visit them. Thank you so much, Nicole. I love, love, love this!!!

APRIL 2, 2016 AT 2:41 PM



thirdeyemom

Thanks Debbie! The school is really cool too. I did a tour of it. I love the work Chicabrava is doing. So amazing and inspiring.

APRIL 4, 2016 AT 10:13 AM



lisadorenfest

This is something that every woman should get behind. Empowering indeed.

APRIL 3, 2016 AT 1:48 AM



thirdeyemom

Yes indeed!

APRIL 4, 2016 AT 10:15 AM



Miriam

What an amazing experience and so inspiring for those girls. A great post Nicole.

APRIL 3, 2016 AT 4:05 AM



thirdeyemom

Thanks Miriam!

APRIL 4, 2016 AT 10:15 AM



anotherday2paradise

Wonderful and heartwarming photos, Nicole. What an amazing outreach! 😊

APRIL 6, 2016 AT 12:28 PM



thirdeyemom

Thank you so much Sylvia!

APRIL 6, 2016 AT 6:26 PM

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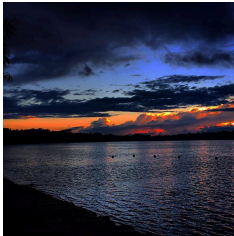
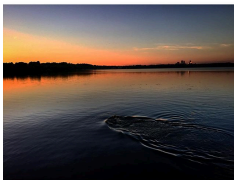
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