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Nearly 10 years ago, The Jessie F. Richardson Foundation's (JFR) president, Dr. Keren Wilson, saw a picture of an elderly woman being taken to a clinic in a wheelbarrow. When she asked about the picture, Dr. Martha Pelaez, then head of the Pan American Health Organization section for elders in Latin American, said, "Let me take you to see conditions for elders in Nicaragua." After



visiting Nicaragua, 2nd poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, several times, Keren thought about how JFR could do more. Keren described a plan to her board to create an initiative that would address immediate needs, build capacity and create sustainable solutions to support indigent elders. Great idea, but pretty overwhelming given JFR's limited resources.



So, in fall of 2002, she turned to 2 Deans at Portland State University (PSU); Marvin Kaiser, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Larry Wallack, College of Urban and Public Affairs. Without hesitating, they asked Keren to put something together. Next, she approached Margaret Neal, Director of the Institute on Aging at PSU. Margaret thought the idea was interesting and asked, "When do you want to do this?" Not guessing that Keren would answer, "next term!" And seven years ago, the first nine students went. By 2010, more than 100 students from PSU have gone, representing majors in Gerontology, Community Health, Urban Planning, Social Work, Engineering, Biology, Spanish, and other disciplines. In 2006, Amber Black, a student in the first group from PSU in 2003, was a graduate student at Pacific University and proposed a similar project there. This fall, they expect 5 allied health disciplines and 40 people to participate in their 4th year. But we needed nursing students. Concordia, with its emphasis on servant leaders, looked like a good candidate. So, Keren pitched the President, Chuck Schlimpert and in 2010, they sent their first team.



In a short period of time, these students have accomplished amazing things and helped JFR make significant inroads in transforming elder care in one of the poorest nations in the world. JFR likes to think of the Nicaragua service learning program as a precursor to a radically new way to address the growing issue of global aging.

Across generations. Across borders.

