

# Trip Report

## Department of Family Medicine and San Jose Partners, Inc

September 2024

### Introduction

San Jose Partners, Inc. (SJP) is a non profit charitable organization based in the Rochester, NY USA area. We have partnered with a group of small communities in Southwest Honduras since 2005. This is a report of activities completed by Doug Stockman and Melissa Rivera (interpreter) during a solo trip they made in late September 2024 to the San Jose area.

### Solar System Installation

The majority of homes in the San Jose area are isolated in the de la Sierra mountain range and do not have electricity. This means there is no light at night or the ability to charge a cell phone. About three years ago SJP designed a very simple low cost modular solar system to provide up to four lights and a USB port to charge cell phones. This simple design has been transformative for the families who have received the system. There are many barriers to installing the systems. Getting reliable solar system supplies to the area and then making the hike to distant mountain homes remain the biggest barriers.

Four to five months ago more solar system equipment was purchased in the US and sent to a shipper in Miami. That shipper guaranteed a great price but then once they had the equipment at their warehouse they demanded 4 times the rate paid previously to a shipper in Los Angeles. After a frantic search another shipper in the Miami area was found that was only 40% more than the LA shipper charged. About a month ago the equipment made it to a nearby village on the main road in the area and an area teacher kept the equipment safe in their home until Doug arrived with a truck to transport the materials to San Jose.



*Ana installing light socket as Doug guides*

Given the huge demand for the solar systems and the very isolated location of many homes, we have been searching for an area person to help with the solar installs. One man showed an interest but upon questioning other community members we discovered he suffers from alcoholism (as do many people in the area) and would not be reliable. Another man began the training but after learning during four installations he dropped out once his family received a solar system. We have been hoping to train a woman given their motivation to support their family and the much lower rate of alcoholism in women from the area. There are many barriers though. For a married woman her husband does not often allow her to be outside the home alone. Then there are reports of increasing violence towards women as they walk the mountain trails. However, this trip one young lady showed an interest and we began the training.

Ana's story is fairly typical for a young woman in the area. She is 17 and already a mother. She believed the tales a young man told her about his undying love for her but once she was pregnant he left and provides no support for his child. Partly from the influence of the Catholic Church many women in the area believe birth control makes women sick or infertile. Fortunately, Ana has the support of her family. Unfortunately, her father, at 43, had a stroke and has left sided weakness and cannot work in the fields. Ana is now the main supporter for this family of 7. She has been working in others' fields making about \$3.25 per day for 8 hours of manual labor. She was so excited to hear about this opportunity that she hiked 40 minutes from her home to the volunteer house each morning.



*Ana with her father and 2 siblings after installing a solar system in their house*

Ana helped with all 8 installations completed this trip and did a great job. She learned quickly and can install the lights without much guidance. She still struggles a bit with the wiring between the solar panel, control box, and battery but she is making progress. In Honduras an apprentice is generally not paid for their time and often has to pay their teacher. Ana's eyes went wide when Doug paid her the equivalent of 8 days of labor in the field for the 8 installations which we completed in three days. Although she is not to the point where she can do solar system installs by herself, she speeds up installs using what she has learned so far. One of the installations this trip was at her home. Hopefully she will continue to help with installations in the future and achieve a level of expertise so she can do the installations independently.

In the past we had an area carpenter build the boxes that hold the battery for the solar system. He unfortunately died from Covid during the pandemic. His nephew took over the carpenter shop but decided to double the price for boxes, given we are from the US. We could not find another area carpenter to take on the job so we now build the battery boxes ourselves. We started building the battery boxes needed for the next trip. A fourteen year old girl who lives near the volunteer house, and we have watched grow up over the years, showed an interest in learning about carpentry. We began basic carpentry training as we built the boxes together. In general, women are not accepted into carpentry training programs so she was so happy to learn a skill she has so far been denied. She completed 6<sup>th</sup> grade in the village school but could not go on for more schooling. Now she works in the family fields but hopes to do more with her life.

We have installed 35 solar systems so far and have enough equipment in San Jose to install another 20 systems. The feedback we get from solar system recipients has been extremely positive. The systems do really change people's lives based on what we are told. We continue to have more people sign up for solar systems and have about 100 people on our list for future installs.



*The Volunteer house porch turned into a workshop*

### **Visit to Health Clinic in San Marcos**

Depending on where a person lives in San Jose there is a government clinic about 1-2 hours walk away. We visited the clinic and learned a bit more. Two doctors work there from about 8:30 am until about 1 pm. Each day one doctor sees patients while the other doctor works on completing government-required reports. About 35 patients are seen each day. The pharmacy in the clinic receives medications from the government every three months. Commonly prescribed medicines such as Tylenol, ibuprofen, and amoxicillin run out well before the next shipment arrives in three months. Patients then either go without or must purchase the medicines, if available, from area shops.

We were hoping to run a GYN clinic this October when the medical group visits San Jose. Cervical Cancer screening options are very limited in the region. We learned that the clinic cannot submit more than three PAP smears a day. The government lab limits how many specimens can be submitted. Running a GYN clinic seems unlikely to happen. The PAP specimens are collected with a wood spatula and rubbed on a microscope slide. We got the feeling they did not have the spray fixative to apply to the specimen after collection.

In the event a woman does have a cervical cancer, treatment becomes a daunting list of obstacles to overcome. Most women in the area cannot afford transport to a regional hospital. If they can make it to a hospital, the patient would need to find a place to stay while awaiting treatment. Most women from the San Jose area could not safely navigate the two major cities where treatment is available. Additionally, the woman would need to have someone in San Jose to care for the rest of her children or other dependent relatives. We must consider Cervical Cancer screening very carefully given the realities of life in rural Honduras before we implement any program.

### **Restaurant Idea and Job Creation**

There are no major employers in the San Jose area. Our idea to “sell” the view to passing motorists on the main road in the region involves building a small restaurant and having local people run the restaurant. We again met and discussed a possible agreement for the use of suitable land.

### **Land Issues**

The school teachers in San Jose Centro believe the land that the volunteer house was built upon is actually for the school and the community gave us the land illegally. They have a document dated 2014 from the school system showing the land belongs to the school. We have a document dated 2009 which grants San Jose Partners a 99 year lease to the land. Working with a Honduran lawyer it appears the community does have the right to the land and the school system does not. However, we have to prove this in the Honduran courts. Doug attempted to meet with the lawyer to begin the legal process, but the timing did not work out this trip.

### **Community Engagement and Future Plans**

Much of our time in San Jose is spent meeting with people from all walks of life. Every day there are various people stopping by as well as impromptu group gatherings. Improving communication and understanding are the foundation of all successful interventions. Sometimes we are squashing wild rumors. Other times we are offering advice. Still others we are considering requests for assistance and making determinations that can change the direction a person’s life takes. Our long term goals remain to improve the quality of life for the people in the San Jose area. The interventions we pursue change over time as the needs of the community and the people changes. Education remains one of the best

long term investments for future improvements. We may create an educational program in the future to teach technical skills they can use to find gainful employment beyond just working in the area fields.

Doug Stockman



*Hiking the mountains to next Solar Install*

*Breathtaking view, but also hard work getting from house to house*

*School girls on the porch visiting with Melissa*

**Update on Project Status** (updated 09/24/2024)

<b>Project</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Completed</b>
Cook stoves	450	Scholarships	175+ students, 35 current scholars
Filters	595	Solar systems	35
Latrines	201	Fish farms	6
Pilas	238	Piped water systems	5 communities
Heirloom seeds	>18,000 given	Barrels and gutters	>80