

DESEA Peru - January 2012

Quarterly newsletter



Qhali Geronima Siccus Ccoya practising infant resuscitation

First Aid Training



Dr. Mark Willcox and RN Sandra McGirr teaching blood loss due to internal trauma



Nurse Vilma Florez teaching the location of the major body organs

In December, with the help of friends RN Keri Baker and Dr. Mark Wilcox (from Ollantaytambo NGO Awakmaki), first aid training was given to our six new qhalis from the three sectors of Huarqui Community during three long days.

Of all the courses we teach, this is always the most exciting. The women initially are shy and uneasy with both the physical contact and the rigorous training. With our hands-on approach, however, they are soon laughing and learning as they practise advanced first aid skills such as: infant CPR, choking and rescue breathing scenarios, shock and management of fractures and burns. It is AMAZING to watch how they transform into community health care workers during these three days, with new skills that they can use immediately within their communities.

The qhalis are the first people in their communities to have learned any advanced first aid. Sadly, these skills are coming too late for one of our qhalis. During the time that I was back in Canada, Qhali Leonarda Puma Human's infant, an eight-month old girl, died of respiratory arrest, likely the result of a severe infection following a vaccination. In this situation no autopsy was performed, so we will never know the true cause of death. Had there been a trained community health worker in the community, she would have had the support she needed to seek emergency care. Her baby died during the long walk over the mountain to the nearest health centre.

A testament to the strength and resilience of the indigenous Andean people, she came to the first day of the first aid course, just 10 days after the death of her daughter; however, the infant CPR portion of the course was overwhelming for her. Understandably she has decided that she cannot continue training as a qhali at this time.

This tragic story only reinforces the need for the work which DESEA is carrying out in high Andean communities. We are hopeful that we will be able to make significant improvements in health outcomes in the new communities in which we are working. In our pilot project communities, since the initiation of the qhali program two years ago, there have been no maternal, infant or under-five deaths and hospital birthing has increased by 250%.

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Community training sessions related to filter use, hygiene and sanitation.

Since the start of the project in the communities of Huarqui a total of 35 PVC biosand water filters have been installed. Leticia Huanca Guevara is progressing well in her position both as a filter educator and in the construction of the filters at the workshop in Lamay. On average Leticia and Sandy have been able to install four filters a week. The rains have been minimal this year allowing for continued access to two of the communities which are usually cut off for two to three months. It is good news for the water filter project but a potential problem for many residents who have no capacity to irrigate and rely on the rains for crop production.

Nurse Vilma Florez has been working individually with each of the new qhalis, teaching the DESEA approach to water filter monitoring and hygiene and sanitation education. In this way the qhalis can learn firsthand from our master, and can try out their new skills with Vilma's support and guidance. Qhalis receive a coloured pictorial book (designed by CAWST, Calgary) which they can use to discuss various aspects of filter maintenance, the importance of clean water, and issues related to hygiene and sanitation. Qhalis visit each household once monthly for filter maintenance, hygiene and sanitation education, and general family support.



Qhali Juana Pullca Puma teaching about filter use and hygiene



Congratulations to our Administrator Sandra Izquierdo and her marriage to Brian Plessinger, pictured here with their son Anka. The wedding took place in Miami in January.

Sandra has been very busy managing the administrative aspects of DESEA. DESEA's application to the Agencia Peruana de Cooperación Internacional - the Peruvian governing body for international development organizations - has recently been approved. This will allow DESEA to apply for charitable status in Peru and for government approval for vitamin imports.

Sandra was also very busy in December securing donations and financial support for one of the indigenous women in our project areas, a mother of eight children, diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. Without Sandra's perseverance and insistence virtually no medical attention would have been offered to this woman. She is presently in Lima awaiting treatment.

DESEA is presently looking for volunteers for the following: Health Professional (RN, NP or MD) and a Water Filter Assistant. Position details have been posted at www.idealists.org (search DESEA Peru).

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