

# Voices from Nicaragua script



**Slide 1:** SIFT is a UK charity that was founded in 2002.

**Slide 2:** SIFT works with the poor of Nicaragua, Central America. Today I'm going to talk about SIFT's projects in Bluefields, around the city of Granada and on the island of Ometepe.

***If your church or group is unfamiliar with Nicaragua, then the following facts may be helpful:***

Nicaragua is about the same size as England but only has a population of six million people. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the country suffered from a dictatorship and a civil war, which has affected its economic development. It also suffers from natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes and volcanoes. For example, Hurricane Mitch in 1998 brought heavy rains that displaced 368,000 people, and an earthquake in 1972 devastated the centre of Managua, leaving 300,000 homeless. Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Americas - 39% of the population live below the poverty line, on less than £2 per day, and 7.6% live in extreme poverty.

**Slide 3:** 2018 was a particularly turbulent year for Nicaragua. In April the Nicaraguan government proposed changes to the social security system which led to widespread protests around the country, particularly in the major towns and cities. Blockades were established on many of the main highways, restricting the flow of goods and leading to food shortages in some areas. Sadly the police and paramilitary response to the protests led to over 300 deaths and thousands of injuries. Even though the political changes were cancelled and the blockades were removed, there is still an atmosphere of fear and discontent.

**Slide 4:** *"He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and makes them inherit a throne of honour."* (The Bible verses featured in the presentation link to upcoming slides. You could use them to provide moments of space and contemplation during the presentation.)

**Slide 5:** SIFT's work started when a Nicaraguan child asked for financial help so that they could go to school. The work has grown and now SIFT supports around 140 children and young people at school and university in the town of Bluefields, on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. SIFT focuses in particular on the more impoverished areas of the town, such as near the rock quarry.

**Slide 6:** SIFT helps parents such as Esmilce to be able to send their children to school. Her daughter, Yanicel, is sponsored by SIFT and is now in the third year of secondary school.

**Slide 7:** Government-run schools in Nicaragua are free, however they are under-resourced and don't have a high standard of teaching. So SIFT pays for their sponsored students to attend private schools. All of these schools are run by churches, so the children receive a Christian education in addition to their academic studies.

**Slide 8:** Margaret Storey, a volunteer from the UK, lives in Bluefields for 8 months a year. She makes monthly checks that the students are attending school and gives pastoral and practical support to them and their families. She is well loved by the children in Bluefields, and SIFT would really struggle without her!

*If you are using the video clips, please now show the education video (vfn\_education.mp4), which is a short interview with one of our sponsored children and her mother.*

**Slide 9:** *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute... defend the rights of the poor and needy."*

**Slide 10:** Granada is the oldest colonial town in Nicaragua, founded by the Spanish in 1524. It's a busy town which normally attracts a lot of tourists. Unfortunately Granada is also a centre for the sex trade. Children and young people are particularly at risk and sometimes girls are forced into prostitution by their families or to support themselves.

*If you are using the video clips, please now show the video about Casa Rahab (vfn\_casa\_rahab.mp4), in which Valeria Lopez tells the story of how the project started.*

**Slide 11:** Valeria Lopez (left) saw this problem and wanted to do something to help. She decided to start a centre for girls who have been or are at risk of being involved in the sex trade. She called it Casa Rahab, or Rahab's house. The girls who attend Casa Rahab have been referred there by the police or local authorities. The other members of the team are Gabriela (who encourages the girls in their education), Jessica (craft teacher) and Roxana (psychologist).

**Slide 12:** The centre provides each girl with a programme of counselling and therapy to help them recover from the experiences that they have been through. Group sessions help the girls to build friendships and talk about their hopes for the future.

**Slide 13:** The team also teach them life skills and work with them to help them finish their schooling. SIFT helps support the work of Casa Rahab by paying the wages of Gabriela (pictured here), who provides the girls with educational support, and Jessica, the craft teacher.

**Slide 14:** *"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones."*

**Slide 15:** We are now going to move on to talk about SIFT's health work, which takes place on the island of Ometepe. The island is home to around 35,000 people, most of whom live in rural farming communities. The tourist industry on Ometepe was heavily affected by last year's unrest, which caused many people to lose their jobs, and is only slowly recovering. SIFT runs health clinics in three communities on the island. On the northern half of Ometepe SIFT's team works in the village of Las Pilas and the town of San José del Sur. The southern half of the island is more remote and so SIFT's clinic in El Corozal provides much needed medical attention to people from the surrounding villages.

**Slide 16:** SIFT's team of seven nurses is led by Dr Sandra Villagra. They provide consultations for a small, affordable fee (currently around £1.30) which is waived if the patients can't afford it. All medicines are provided for free.

**Slide 17:** At government clinics you can see the doctor for free but have to pay for your medicines. This often means that people can't afford treatment, particularly those from poor families. As well as treating patients SIFT's team provide health education, giving talks to people who are waiting for their appointments.

**Slide 18:** All of SIFT's team are Christians and so there are often opportunities for them to listen to the concerns of their patients, counsel them from the Bible and pray for them. Nicaraguan society is much more open to the Gospel than the UK and so patients are generally very happy to receive prayer.

**Slide 19:** The team run a club for expectant mothers where they teach the mothers about what to expect during pregnancy and how to recognise the signs of common problems they may experience. The women are taught how to cook nutritious food for their families and are given baby clothes. As they approach their due date, Dr Sandra gives them ultrasound scans, and SIFT's nurses carry out follow-up home visits to check on the health of mother and baby.

*If you are using the video clips, please now show the luncheon club video (vfn\_luncheon\_club.mp4), which shows another club run by our nursing team.*

**Slide 20:** *"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."*

**Slide 21:** SIFT also supports a Feeding Programme on the island of Ometepe which is attended by between 40 and 50 children on Monday and Friday afternoons. Each session begins with some action songs, which the children enjoy singing. They often request their favourite ones! Here the songs are being led by Max.

**Slide 22:** Before the milk is served, Porferio tells the children a Bible story and helps them learn a memory verse. The team want to ensure that the mothers also have the chance to hear the good news of Jesus and so while the children do their activities there is a Bible study for them, led by a Christian teacher called Manuel.

**Slide 23:** Each child receives a glass of high-vitamin milk and on Fridays they are also given a hot meal. This tends to be rice which has been fortified with soya, along with pieces of chicken, vegetables and a roll.

*If you are using the video clips, please show the feeding programme video (vfn\_feeding\_programme.mp4) which will give your congregation a flavour of a session at the Feeding Programme!*

**Slide 24:** Here are some ways that you can support SIFT and help those people that we have seen and heard from today. You can pray for SIFT using the monthly prayer and news sheet, receive the SIFT Insight, or support SIFT on a regular or one-off basis.

**Slide 25:** Thank you for your support and interest in SIFT. If anyone would like any additional information about SIFT, please come and talk to me at the end.