

# Cassie Chandler

2007 HSHPS/FRONTERA Trainee, Tucson, Ariz.

## “Integrated Microcredit in Nogales, Mexico”

*Cassie Chandler was an HSHPS/FRONTERA summer 2007 intern in Tucson, Ariz. where she conducted research and worked on a project with EnComún.*

The HSHPS/FRONTERA internship provided me with the opportunity to work with *EnComún de la Frontera*. I learned first hand the need for economic development as well as social empowerment in communities such as Nogales.

*EnComún* is a micro credit organization that creates economic opportunities for impoverished people in Nogales. One intended result of *EnComún* is to decrease the need and desire to make the dangerous journeys across the border to the U.S. for better economic opportunities and quality of life.

*EnComún* is a nonprofit whose objectives are “to reduce extreme poverty, to increase economic stability, and to improve the quality of life among clients and their family members.” This is accomplished by providing small loans to community members who would not qualify for a traditional bank loan. According to *EnComún*, “small loans and business support are provided to the poorest of the poor to enable them to start sustainable businesses and escape poverty.”

*EnComún* is trying to evolve into an “integrated” micro credit institution which not only supports economic development, but also incorporates social services, such as health education. As economic well-being and health are invariably tied, *EnComún’s* goal is to implement a health education component as an added service for their clients.

This past summer, I was responsible for integrating a health promotion and education component into *EnComún’s* services. Health problems in this region vary due to people crossing the U.S.–Mexican border daily. Many of the diseases found among the Nogales community are common chronic diseases found in the United States, like diabetes, hypertension, and obesity, as well as diseases that plague developing countries, like respiratory infections and diarrhoeal illnesses.

To better understand this complex community, I conducted a research study in the form of a needs assessment and survey questionnaire. The study, which surveyed 100 people, provided *EnComún’s* staff with a better understanding of the health problems and the level of health awareness within the community. After gathering this information, I met with local hospitals, clinics, and social services staff to verify the existing health problems found in the assessments. I also tried to identify potential partners and availability of resources that would eventually help the Nogales community.

Taking into account the community’s health needs as well as *EnComún’s* goals, I began a five-step “intervention” phase with the objective of improving health knowledge and awareness among *EnComún* clients.

## “Building capacity to improve health and well-being”

### **1. Health Education Presentations:**

After various meetings and discussions with local health agencies, I found two partners who would provide short lectures on health topics to *EnComún’s* clients during client bank meetings. *Centro de*

*Información y Salud* (CISAL, Center of Information and Health) and *Las Enfermeras Jubiladas* (LEJ, Retired Nurses) gave short presentations on rotating health topics in order to reach as many people as possible. *EnComún* has agreed to reciprocate and provide CISAL and LEJ with the support and resources they need.

## **2. *EnComún* Banking Promoter Training**

I trained *promotoras* on topics such as diabetes, nutrition, and domestic violence, in order to familiarize them with more health topics. I also encouraged them to give short presentations to clients using visual aids that I had created and used to help the community understand the various symptoms, prevention methods, and solutions to their health problems.

## **3. Curriculum Binders**

The health curriculum binders were created to serve as a resource for *EnComún's* clients and staff. The binders included detailed information about: effective communication, diabetes, nutrition, domestic violence, mental health, substance abuse/addiction, hygiene, family planning, sex education, and HIV/AIDS. The binder also included hints on how to incorporate the above health topics into interesting and effective health presentations.

## **4. Mesa de Salud**

With the help of the health promotion publications provided by *Nogales Centro de Salud* Health Promotion Unit, *EnComún* set up a display table in the waiting room, which provided clients with pamphlets, posters, and packets on various health topics

## **5. Local Health Resource Guide**

This guide was created as a tool for *EnComún's* staff and clients regarding different health service centers. The guide included the name of the facility, location, cost and services provided. To measure the success and effectiveness of the intervention, it was necessary to create a monitoring and evaluation plan which assessed and measured the changes in health knowledge and awareness within the community. At the beginning of this project, *EnComún's* staff surveyed 100 clients about their knowledge on various health topics. In summer 2008, they will survey the same 100 clients with an identical test to analyze how effective the intervention plan was.

Throughout this experience, I gained unique insight through working with *EnComún* and spending time volunteering with organizations that give aid to migrants crossing the desert. The U.S.-Mexico border region is unique and thus it is important for health professionals to understand this dynamic environment so as to better accommodate the needs of the people living there. I would like to give a special thanks to Tracy Carroll, Oscar Beita, Linda Don, Evy Kory, Donovan Williams, Anne Hill and Eva Shaw, for the incredible opportunity and help they provided me throughout the HSHPS/FRONTERA internship program.

*For more information about EnComún go to: [www.bancomun.org](http://www.bancomun.org)*