

YOUNG PEOPLE IN LA CONFIANZA:

HENRY PEREZ PORTALES (19) AND NAHELI GUTIERREZ (15).

Henry Perez Portales

Name: Henry Perez Portales

Age: 19

Family: Lives in La Confianza with mum Joaquina and dad Pedro, older brother Samuel (21) and younger brother and sisters Mayra (11), Giselda (8) and Erilin (5).

Likes: Building and making things.

Dislikes: Getting up at 4am.

Hopes: For the family to own a plot of land.



“Can it really be only ten months since I moved here to ‘La Confianza’ with my family? The warm welcome we received from the community made up for the poor living conditions we have to put up with. We arrived in early that December morning with little more than a small cardboard box containing the families’ possessions and the clothes on our back. The community gave us some money to buy plastic and my older brother Samuel and I set about making a house, using branches of wood as a frame. Samuel suggested we use palm leaves to make beds for the family and they were all pleased with the end result. The house is basic and it can feel like you are sleeping in an oven at night but it is dry and is the place we call home at present.

Six days a week I get up at 4am and grab some beans and tortillas for breakfast before walking an hour to the plantation. Working conditions here on the plantation are difficult but I am no stranger to hard work. My earliest childhood memory is when I was taken out of school by my parents to work at a factory. I was given a long metal spike and was expected to raise heavy palm fruit over my shoulders in order to smash it off the ground to break it up. It was back breaking work and we received only 50 cents a day for our efforts. Back in those days we had very little money and my mum would buy food on a daily basis from one of the small shops in the town. My parents moved here so that one day we can hopefully own a small plot of land ourselves and we can begin to feed ourselves.”

PHOTO ALBUM



Above Left: Henry's Mum and Dad, right, his sister Giselda standing outside their house.



Above left: Naheli's brother Dani, with her mum Maria. Right: Naheli and her sister Diana chat to Trócaire workers about life in the camp.



Naheli Gutierrez.

Name: Naheli Damari Guitierrez Perez

Age: 15

Family: Mum Maria and dad Rigoberto, older sister Diana (17) and younger brother Dani (11).

Likes: Chatting with friends, spending time with her sister Diana.

Dislikes: Sleeping on palm leaves, being on kitchen duty.

Nickname: 'Little Warrior' – called this because she has a strong sense of justice.

Hopes: To become a teacher one day and teach other children who have also been forced from their homes.

I woke up this morning and felt like I hadn't slept at all. I don't think I will ever get used to sleeping on palm leaves and under a blue nylon roof instead of a house. As time passes I almost forget what our old life used to be like, in our hometown of Cabrera. Both of my parents had good jobs and I was excited about entering my first year of secondary school. However, I don't regret joining my parents here in the camp for a minute. I'm not saying it's easy, especially since both of my parents have lost their jobs due to their involvement in the MUCA land movement. MUCA is a cooperative of 5 communities, one of which is La Confianza. These communities are trying to reclaim 11,000 hectares of land and as a result face violent attacks from the wealthy landowner. Several members of MUCA have been murdered over the past few years in their struggle to win back the land that is rightfully theirs. We face daily intimidation and money is difficult to come by. We cannot build strong houses because they are often attacked and burnt down by the landowner's security. Yet I am really proud of both my parents, especially my mum who is one of the few female camp leaders. Just recently my dad has been elected President of the camp.

Living here consists of either long hot days working on the African Palm plantations or even longer hotter days working in one of the many camp kitchens. If I had a choice I would gladly work on the plantations, the work is physical and your muscles ache but I get to finish earlier and catch up with my friends in the afternoon. I hate working in the kitchens because it feels like you are working in an oven and the day seems to go on forever. My sister Diana helps me get through it all and because we work together we are closer than ever.

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