



## ***International Service Learning Through Social Entrepreneurship***

*Volume 1. Issue 6*

A microfinance project in the heart of Mexico is providing robust opportunities for international service learning for students at IUPUI while empowering women and supporting economic development. With funding from the Rotary Club of Indianapolis and the IUPUI [BiCCHC Signature Center](#) and through support from partners here and in Mexico, the Calnali Microfinance Project allows citizens of Calnali and other small towns in that area of Mexico to borrow small amounts of money, often as little as \$200-300, to start their own companies. Borrowers are organized into groups in order to provide peer support and are offered training in their chosen endeavors, in money management and in small business management.



A delegation from IUPUI visited Calnali in March 2010 to introduce the project to the community and its leaders. The first group of citizens applied for their loans in summer 2010. By February 2012, the project was already serving 153 women and carried a loan portfolio of MX\$572,391 (approximately US \$44,400). Because of this overwhelming response, Pro Mujer, the project's fiscal agent, recently hired a loan officer to service the borrowers in Calnali exclusively. Some of the activities that borrowers may choose for their new companies include making school uniforms, traditional embroidery and beadwork and pottery. Service Learning Assistants, funded by the Center for Service and Learning, have been integral to the success of the Calnali Microfinance Project.

Student scholars in the Service Learning Assistant (SLA) scholarship program are IUPUI students selected by faculty or professional staff to assist in the implementation of a service learning class, conduct community-based research, expand the capacity of campus departments to increase the number of students who participate in service-learning, or complete a service project in and with the community.

The SLAs' involved in the Calnali Microfinance Project contributed with activities that have included translating between Spanish and English, assisting with grant proposals and funding requests, giving presentations and posters at a local and regional conferences, designing and maintaining a bilingual website, participating in community events, such as the Meet Your Global Neighbors microfinance panel and the Taylor Symposium, attending Rotary meetings and networking with leaders of companies and non-profit organizations in Central Indiana. The current Service Learning Assistant on the project, Ms. Ashley Oliver, recently attended the Midwest SoTL Conference with Professor Sara Anne Hook, the champion and project leader for the Calnali Microfinance Project, where she gave a competitively-selected presentation about her experiences working on this social entrepreneurship project that they are both passionate about.

