

Nicaraguan youth leader visits Seattle



From left to right: Bill and Paula Clapp (SIF co-founders) and Vilma Medrano and Jahaira Aburto Valerio (TeenSmart International).

underprivileged youth, similar to those of TSI in Nicaragua. [Matt Griffin YMCA](#) enthusiastically acquainted Jahaira with their community athletic facilities, and introduced Jahaira to Tye Senior High School students participating in their Youth Ambassadors and Earth Service Corps program. These interactions gave Jahaira the opportunity to talk about her community involvement and work with youth in Nicaragua. In addition, Jahaira and Vilma met with program directors of YMCA Nicaragua, sparking amity and dialogue about possible future collaboration between the YMCA and TeenSmart. Local Community Health Center [Sea Mar](#) also had the opportunity to meet with Jahaira and Vilma and introduce their new [Youth Health platform](#)—Joven Salud. Sea Mar is a community-based organization committed to providing quality, comprehensive [health and human services](#) to diverse communities, specializing in service to Latinos. Without a minute lost in their packed schedule, Jahaira and Vilma were still able to enjoy some sightseeing and dining with SIF and YMCA staff, as well as with two of iLEAP's Central American Fellows, [Rocío González](#) and [Agueda Ordeñana](#).

Jahaira projected her powerful story and notable zeal for life and community involvement to many of Seattle's most influential leaders at the [27th annual A.K. Guy Award ceremony](#). This year's award ceremony honored Seattle International Foundation founders [Bill and Paula Clapp](#) for their pioneering role in addressing issues of poverty and inspiring others to engage in the global community and make the world a better place. As a surprise speaker, Jahaira left hundreds speechless as she served as an example of a young leader empowered by Bill and Paula's commitment to youth leadership, both locally in Seattle, and abroad.

Last week, SIF had the pleasure of hosting [TeenSmart International](#) (TSI) graduate Jahaira Aburto Valerio and the Director of TSI Nicaragua, Vilma Medrano, during their visit to Seattle. Jahaira, an 18-year old from outside of Managua, is a TSI alumnus who continues to donate her time to mentor current TSI participants. In addition, she coordinates the Student Sports Movement for secondary schools at a national level. When she is not busy studying for her Technical Accounting degree in preparation for a degree in Architecture, she is a volunteer facilitator of TeenSmart International and teaches classes to girls and boys between the ages of 9-12 years old.

During their stay, Jahaira and Vilma were able to meet with local organizations hosting academic and community empowerment programs for



Jahaira thanked Bill & Paula Clapp for their support of TeenSmart International at the 27th annual A.K. Guy Award ceremony.



President and CEO of Seattle YMCA, Robert Gilbertson, congratulates Jahaira on her speech.

their own wellbeing and that of others. Today, I can tell you that thank you to your generosity there are joyful, enthusiastic young leaders with desire to build a better world.”

The Seattle International Foundation provided a grant to TeenSmart International in [2009](#), in support of their work with at-risk and troubled youth in Nicaragua. SIF Program Officer Michele Frix [traveled to Nicaragua](#) in September 2010 to observe the TSI graduation ceremony of several teens who as an alternative to being sentenced to jail time, were allowed the opportunity to complete TSI’s 14 module course about healthy lifestyle habits and community involvement.

Jahaira led the audience through her involvement with TeenSmart, her life pursuits, and the positive changes she’s seen in herself and in others thanks to TSI. An excerpt of her speech follows.

“..[The program] helped me discover that I was a leader with my own, healthy ideas. I have learned to value myself for what I do and who I am. It is to say that I can now get back up and move forward after facing a problem; the challenges that life presents me have allowed me to strengthen my security and self-confidence. Leaders are people that love what they do; they are firm boulders against the wind and tides. They are conscious of the changing process of adolescents and work for