

# GSIS graduate helping Mexican children

## Harger heads nonprofit aiding victims of poverty

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Alumna of the graduate school of international studies Jeni Goevelinger Harger is no ordinary soon-to-be mother. While preparing for the birth of her first child she is helping to improve the lives of children and their families in Puebla, Mexico-one of the country's poorest states.

Harger is the director of the Denver based nonprofit Together with the Children (TWC) which is raising awareness and funds for their sister organization the JUCONI Foundation. The foundation was established in 1989 and helps children living in poverty on the streets of Puebla.

Harger became involved with JUCONI in 2001 when she spent one year volunteering with their program in Ecuador. Later, while studying for her master's in international development at GSIS, she spent six weeks in 2005 working with JUCONI Mexico. She was hooked by then.

She explained enthusiastically "It's hard not to fall in love with [the program] once you've experienced it first hand."

Each year, JUCONI improves the lives of 350 street children in the areas of education, basic health and lifestyle choices that will take kids off the streets of Puebla and into the classroom. However, their focus goes well beyond the basic needs of the children. The program also targets more than 150 parents to help create better lives for the entire family. They have created permanent positive life changes in more than 80 percent of the children they work with.

According to Harger their work isn't finished until the whole family has reached their goals.

"They're with [JUCONI] as long as it takes. It's usually three to five years, but we have some families that have been with us for nine years." She explained. "The families just have different hurdles to overcome."

Since its creation in Feb. 2007 TWC has started working on a number of programs in Denver that will greatly benefit JUCONI including one which directly involves the children. They have been given digital cameras to record their lives and this winter TWC plans to hold gallery showings of the art at Tenn Street Coffee and Café Europa. The public will be able to buy the photographs while also learning about poverty in Mexico and the JUCONI program.

"The idea is to let them be artistic and express themselves in any way they need too." She said.

They are also in discussion about working directly with Denver schools on fundraising for JUCONI as well as distance learning between the classrooms. Harger says that the collaboration will educate Colorado children about others their own age who are less fortunate and get them an early start in activism and poverty relief.

DU students are encouraged to get involved with TWC. They are currently looking for volunteers to help with their projects in Denver. For people interested in learning more about TWC and JUCONI first hand they are offering Insight Trips to get an in depth tour and some good on-on-one time with children involved in the program. Those interested should go to [togetherwiththechildren.org](http://togetherwiththechildren.org).