Ixchen, one of Nicaragua’s foremost women’s support organizations, works to improve the quality of life of the women of Nicaragua. The organization is comprised of a team of doctors, lawyers, psychologists, and educators who strive to promote and defend women’s sexual and reproductive rights, and help women live lives free of violence. They work towards a change of attitudes and behaviors that will contribute to the enablement and empowerment of women to make their own decisions. Ixchen works towards the attainment of these goals by providing free and low-cost legal, psychological, and medical attention for all women, particularly women of scarce resources, as well as offering educational workshops on human rights, women’s rights, and legal rights. The organization was founded in 1989 beginning with one small center in Managua, but they have since expanded to include four locations in different areas of Managua, as well as five locations in other Nicaraguan cities.

I worked at the Granada branch of Ixchen for four weeks. My responsibilities primarily included the preparation and conduction of educational materials and events. My time and work at Ixchen was for the most part centered on the occurrence of two large events: the celebration of the day against gender-based violence and the International AIDS Awareness Day. November 25th, El Día Contra La Violencia, is a day that is celebrated to bring awareness to the issues surrounding gender-based violence. Ixchen, along with six other Granada-based organizations, organized an educational event in the central park in Granada for this day. The event included the distribution of educational materials, guest speakers, and games. I was able to participate in the organization of this event through the development of an educational display and a pamphlet with information about domestic violence and ways to seek help. I also developed an educational display for the International AIDS Awareness Day on December 1st. On this day, many organizations provided educational materials and participated in a march through the city, free HIV tests were given by the Ministry of Health, and guest speakers spoke about the issues surrounding the topic of HIV/AIDS. I
learned so much both about the issues surrounding domestic violence and the issues surrounding HIV/AIDS through my participation in these two events.

I was also able to participate in a weekly women’s support group in a small town located close to Granada called Diriomo. Every week the psychologist that works at Ixchen would choose a different theme to discuss at the meetings. The first week I attended one of these meetings, I merely observed what happened. However, in the following weeks, I was able to help plan different aspects of the meeting such as the ice-breakers we used to help make everyone feel more comfortable. I also found that by the last week I was much more comfortable sharing my personal experiences and opinions about the topics we discussed. Participating in these meetings was a very valuable experience for me because I felt that I was able to connect with the women there on a personal level.

Other activities I worked on while at Ixchen included some translation of documents from Spanish to English and the distribution of information about breast and cervical cancer. I learned so much from my work with Ixchen and I really value the experiences I had while working with the organization. However there was one aspect of the experience that I found a bit frustrating. It seemed that there was never enough work for me to do even though in reality there is so much to be done. I attempted to provide ideas for projects I could work on while I was there, but it never seemed like my ideas were taken seriously. One of the women that works at Ixchen mentioned that they very rarely have volunteers or interns working with them, so it is possible that this is the reason for the disorganization that I experienced. They just seem to not know what to do with volunteers, which I think is very ineffective and disappointing.

Although I was initially disappointed with the lack of work at Ixchen, I was eventually able to use the information I had learned while planning for the International AIDS Awareness Day in an independent project I worked on with a Spanish school in Granada during my final week. I worked with the school and another volunteer from Ixchen to develop an educational talk about HIV/AIDS. We then went to two different neighborhoods in Granada and presented the information we had put together. Of all of the great experiences I had while working in Granada, this was the most amazing learning experience of all. Giving these presentations was extremely challenging both
because I am not quite fluent in Spanish and because HIV/AIDS is an area that I had not previously studied extensively until my work at Ixchen. However, everything ended up going very well and I learned so much.

My experience working in Nicaragua had its ups and downs, but in the end it was a truly positive experience that taught me so much. I am very grateful to the LACIS department for providing me with the opportunity to travel to Nicaragua and work with Ixchen.

Thank you!