



Fall Update –October 2010– Guatemala Friends Scholarship/Loan Program –PROGRESA-

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COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECTS

As most of you know, this is the second year that we have required all of our students to execute a community service project in exchange for the scholarship money they receive. As a result of our experience last year, we have been able to clarify our requirements and make some small improvements to the program. Consequently, by September 1st, 70 students have already handed in the first draft of their service proposal for 2010. Forty of these proposals have been accepted and are now in the process of execution. We have also been able to improve our contact with the organizations with which the students are affiliating in the execution of their projects and have already spoken with many of them by telephone.

In April, during our conference, all of the students had the opportunity to work in groups and share their experiences regarding last year's community service projects. All of the students enjoyed this opportunity to share their accomplishments and several of the new students reported that hearing other students talk about the things they had done gave them ideas about projects they might perform. As a result of the group work several students suggested that they be allowed to do group projects this year. We did not allow them for this year but are considering the possibility for next year. During the conference Miguel Angel also gave a workshop on writing proposals with information about including goals and timetables.

In short we learned a lot during the first year and have now developed a better system of support and control for this year's projects. The quality of the initial proposals has also improved and we were able to approve almost half of them with very little revision. We have included only two examples of

projects in this UpDate but if you would like to read about more examples of the ways in which our students have contributed to their communities visit:

<http://guatemalafriends.org/program/communityservice.html> Periodically we will be updating this webpage with more examples of student projects. We will also add samples of the new projects as they are completed this year.

Citizenship training for young Mayas

This project was executed by **Karisol Ajanel**, 26, a student in fourth year law who was born in Momostenango, Totonicapan. Karisol worked with 50 secondary students who were receiving scholarships from a project named Pop Atziak in Totonicapan. Among the topics that Karisol proposed for her classes were: functions of the state, human rights, women's rights, rights of the indigenous, laws protecting the environment and decentralization of the state.



Karisol (on the left) during one of her workshops

This past July we had the opportunity to visit Karisol during one of her project workshops. It was a pleasure to see how interested the participants were in the topics. On this occasion Karisol was

talking about the way in which the government was organized and the functions of each of its branches: executive, legislative and judicial. The discussion gave the students the opportunity to clarify their doubts about the roles played by each of the branches of government and also to express their ideas about how the various functionaries (ministers, deputies, etc.) ought to behave in fulfilling their roles. This part of the discussion seemed very relevant to us in that it suggested what characteristics one should look for in electing officials. Some of the students offered examples of cases of corruption and abuse that they had observed in their local authorities. We felt very satisfied when we left because we were sure that the workshops would help the students to better exercise their rights and obligations.

A garden of medicinal plants

For centuries the Mayan people have used medicinal plants for the prevention and cure of various health problems. For this reason, **Amanda Petronila Toledo**, 24, a student in the second year of social work, decided to create a garden of medicinal plants for her community service project. She carried out her project in Santa Eulalia, Huehuetenango, the village where she was born, which is located in a very remote area of western Guatemala, more than 350 kilometers from the capital city of Guatemala.



Amanda organized this project with a group of about 80 midwives and health promoters from her village and the surrounding area. The principle goal was to train the participants in the art of sowing, raising and using various medicinal plants. In the first part of the project Amanda combined

knowledge she had gained in a traditional agriculture course she had received in high school with knowledge that some of the most experienced midwives in her community brought to the workshop. She then offered two workshops. In the first she discussed the theory and use of the various medicinal plants and in the second workshop she provided practical information about the sowing and care of the plants.

Amanda hopes that her project will encourage the increased use of medicinal plants and lessen the need for chemical medicines which are not only much more expensive but can also have negative side effects. She also hopes that with the medicinal garden the participants will be able to create an additional source of income which is much needed in the rural areas of the country.

A NEW PROJECT ON BIOINTENSIVE AGRICULTURE

One of the biggest problems Guatemala faces is its high level of infant malnutrition. According to UNICEF Guatemala has the highest level of chronic malnutrition in Latin America with 49% of children affected. Among the reasons for this problem are the high levels of extreme poverty (half the population lives on less than \$3 per day) and the degradation of the land itself which each year produces less and less.

In October of 2009 Susanne Ratcliffe, one of our loyal donors, contacted us about her concern in the area of malnutrition and made a suggestion of how we might help to improve food production in Guatemala by introducing the bio-intensive agricultural techniques developed by John Jeavons in California. This method uses cultivation techniques which increase production and at the same time improve and enrich the soil. The process

Our students' projects are one of the best ways to fulfill our mission statement: "To provide access to in-country educational and community development opportunities in order to bring choice into the lives of poor Guatemalans and enable them to participate in their country's growth and development"

is totally organic and is especially useful to small farmers who often have little land and poor soil, characteristics which exactly describe the majority of Guatemalan “campesinos”.

A workshop utilizing the Jeavons’ methods was going to be offered in Mexico and Susanne suggested that we send a couple of our agricultural students to participate. After several months of planning and Susanne’s valiant work in fund raising, in May, we were able to send one ex-student who had studied agronomy, Elvys Sarat, to Xochitla, Mexico D.F. to participate in a conference entitled “Encuentro Latinoamericano: bio-intensive agriculture and climate change” At the conference he received the basic course in this bio-intensive method along with participants from 15 Latin American countries.



Elvys (first on the left) during the field practice in Xochitla.

Now comes the second part of the plan which is to teach these cultivation techniques to local groups so that they can produce their own food and help to restore the quality of their land. We know this won’t be easy and it represents a new and distinct project for our program but we believe that it is worth doing because it is so important to our communities.

Our plan is to offer a first workshop to a local group and some of our students in a village near to our offices. In that way at least one of the office staff will be able to participate and we will be better able

to evaluate what happens. Elvys is eager to tell others about what he has learned, and we have informed him that the time he spends giving workshops can be used as a community service project and serve as partial repayment of his student loan. We hope that the students who participate will learn enough that they will be able to offer workshops in the following year in their home communities as their community service projects. We think it offers the potential of a win win situation for all involved..

The costs of this first workshop will be partially covered by the donations that Susanne Ratcliff solicited from her friends but if you would like to contribute toward this project you can send checks to Redwood Forest Friends Meeting with the words Bio-intensive Agriculture Workshops added to the memo section.

NEWS FROM EXBECARIOS.

Claudia Esperanza Chen Riveiro.

At times we are gratified to receive news via e-mail of achievements our former students have made. This is especially so when they are helping their own communities. Here is news from Claudia, who graduated as a professional nurse in 2005.



Claudia and her daughter Nathaly

“Hi, how are you. It has been a while since I have contacted you, but I want to thank you for your help in my studies. At present I am in charge of a program in rural health in the Ixcán. (The Ixcán has many communities of former refugees of the civil war in the past who returned from asylum in Mexico at the end of the war) We work is to reduce the death rate, with

emphasis on sexual health of teenagers. There are many pregnancies among that age group”.

Life has not been easy for Claudia, even after she graduated. At first she had to work at temporary jobs; then she began to work with midwives but was paid irregularly. She also has had to deal with family problems but in spite of all she returned to school and has now completed her licenciatura. We are really glad to hear of her successes.

Juan Vásquez Hernández

In 2003 our program helped Juan Vasquez Hernandez, a young man from San Juan La Laguna to study high school which he finished in 2005. After a couple of years working at various jobs, Juan obtained a scholarship to study Business Administration in the field of agriculture at Modesto Junior College in Modesto, California. This scholarship lasted for two years and was given by the scholarship program, Seeds, which is financed by USAID.



This year Juan has returned to Guatemala with many new ideas and the desire to help his community. With this in mind, Juan has asked us for the opportunity to repay his high school loan by working in a community service project. He proposes offering his services in evaluating and improving the production and sales of a small cooperative in his village which produces organic coffee. According to what he has told us, the principle problem of small agricultural co-ops is finding better markets for their product, especially markets outside of Guatemala. In the future Juan would like to organize all of the agricultural cooperatives in his town so they can negotiate together for better prices in the global market. We are very proud of Juan’s success and are confident that he will be able bring his ideas to fruition and help his community.

Rafael Rodríguez

We thought we had lost contact with a former student from 1990 to 1992. Rafael Rodríguez had graduated then as a professional nurse. What we usually do in these cases is contact the original home of his family. In that way we were able to learn from him that after graduating in 1992 he worked for seven years in the health center in Nebaj, Quiché. Later he returned to Huehuetenango where he was a commissioner of rural health. At present he is an ambulance nurse for a private nonprofit organization, which serves the rural area by promoting health services, vaccinations, attention to pregnant women, and malnutrition in children.



For the administration of Progreso, it is very satisfying to hear this kind of news, even more so when they contact us. It motivates us to continue our work.

TEACHING ENGLISH WORKSHOPS

The next Teaching English Workshop will be held from January 4th through January 12th in Antigua Guatemala. We are nearly filled to capacity but could still accept three or four more volunteers. For more information about this fun-filled and worthwhile volunteer opportunity go to our website: www.guatemalafriends.org and follow the links to the Teaching English Tour. If you are interested please e-mail us without delay at: progreso3@gmail.com

Many thanks to all our donors for helping us in changing Guatemala through education. You can also be part of this rewarding project!

Make your checks payable to **Redwood Forest Friends Meeting** and mail them to:
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Attn: Guatemala Scholarship Loan Program
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All donations are tax deductible!