



EDUCATING CHILDREN, EMPOWERING FAMILIES

our mission: Common Hope promotes hope and opportunity in Guatemala, partnering with children, families, and communities who want to participate in a process of development to improve their lives through education, health care, and housing.

Winter 2007



COMMON HOPE NEWS

A Juggling Act:

High school students persevere despite many obstacles in their path

In Guatemala, education is required only through the sixth grade. Many children don't even get that far. While solid statistics are difficult to come by, it is estimated that only half of Guatemala's children complete grade school.

Those who do continue deal with a myriad of challenges and show great determination as they juggle their commitments and busy schedules—attending school, working to support their family, traveling long distances, helping out at home, and studying at night with poor light.

A major challenge is economic. Tuition fees increase significantly in high school. Many students feel a strong pressure to start working as early as possible, and this pressure heightens if a family's

situation takes a turn for the worse due to unemployment, sickness, or death.

Manuel, an eighteen year old and the eldest of five children, lives in the village of Santa Ana. He was studying in high school when his father stopped supporting him economically. Manuel tried to overcome this by taking a day job and studying a shorter night course, but confronted by further obstacles he was forced to drop out.



Fortunately, Common Hope was able to help. Manuel's fees were covered 100% by his scholarship and he was able to give studying another try.

JUGGLING continues on page 5

New Hope School Marks a Milestone

Entire sixth grade class graduates and goes on to junior high next school year

Thirteen year old **Doris Mabel** has seen many changes since she moved to New Hope Village as a seven year old. Her family was one of the first nine to be resettled. Doris is one of those instantly likable personalities, with big eyes and a big smile. She laughs when she recalls New Hope School back then—a simple building constructed out of pre-fabricated panels. "There were only two of us in first grade," Doris says, "just Erick, me and our teacher!" In fact, there were only 17 students in the whole school.

Back in 2001 the community was just developing. It was started after Hurricane Mitch, intended as a relocation project for poor families from Guatemala City. Doris's family lived in a dangerous and precarious situation prior to moving to New Hope. She lived with her parents and three brothers

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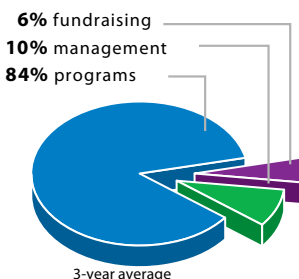
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A SIMPLE QUESTION

“Why are the people in Guatemala so poor, Mom?”

My kindergartner asked me this one day as he was eating breakfast before school. I was caught up in the family’s morning rush, yet this question deserved a thoughtful answer before we had to run out the door.



Kids have a knack for asking very simple questions that defy simple answers.

Sam knows that in Guatemala not all kids get to go to school, that there isn’t always enough food to eat, or a warm, safe place to live. We frequently talk about how thankful we are for our blessings, and that we have a responsibility to share with people who have less.

Now I needed to explain why.

Does anyone completely understand the complex web of factors that contribute to poverty? History has a role. Greed has a role. Government policy has a role. The poor have a role. We have a role. Whatever the reasons, it is clear that everyone has a right to basic necessities and access to education and opportunity.

I’d love to tell you that my answer was inspiring. The truth is I don’t know all of the reasons. Luckily, it was enough for Sam ... for now.

“If there were a simple answer,
poverty would be easier to solve.”

If there were a simple answer, poverty would be easier to solve. While it’s crucial to understand the causes, the danger is getting stuck in our heads trying to figure it all out. An equally important question comes from our hearts, “What can I do to help?”

I love the work of Common Hope because it is a beautiful blend of head and heart. There is an unrelenting analysis and adjustment, but there is also compassion, generosity – and action. We can do something. We can build a home. We can give a student an education. We can help a family transform a life.

Sam wants to help, too. It’s really the reason he asked.

Together we are the answer – please share a gift of yourself today!

Shari Blindt
Executive Director

Common Hope is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation founded in 1986 and is audited annually. Contributions are 100% tax deductible as allowed by law.

Become a Sponsor!

Here are just a few of the wonderful students in Guatemala who are waiting for Sponsors. Your sponsorship helps provide education, health care, housing, and so much more. Sponsorship is an opportunity to make a real difference and a lasting connection with a family in need. Last year, 206 Sponsors visited their student in Guatemala. Please consider sponsoring a child today.



Allan Barrera, Age 14
Wants to be an architect



Cristian de León, Age 10
Wants to be a lawyer



Vilma Cuca, Age 12
Wants to be a lawyer



Jesica Saz, Age 8
Wants to be a veterinarian



Jonathan Aguilar, Age 7
Wants to be an architect



Estefany Lopez, Age 5
Wants to be a doctor

What You Can Do

If you would like to sponsor one of these students or any of the other children waiting for a sponsorship, please call Jessie or Kate at 651-917-1045 or check out our website at (www.commonhope.org/sponsorship/signup.htm).

Supporters Taking Action



Xerxes and Lisa in front of the giving tree.

Supporters from **Winnetka, IL** and the surrounding area gathered at Sunset Ridge Country Club on November 16th for a special benefit. Led by co-chairs Xerxes Bhote and Mirela Gabrovska, the committee of volunteers organized a lively evening filled with dinner, a Guatemalan market, and presentations by John Huebsch and Executive Director, Shari Blindt. The event was attended by 165 people, 68 new to Common Hope.

Over the past few years five Vision Teams from Winnetka have traveled to Guatemala, and another team is planned for this March. Said team leader Joe Shank, "we had the opportunity to catch that 'wave of the Spirit' of which Common Hope is an expression and ride it with joy, laughter, compassion, and tears." Co-chair Xerxes added, "this event was the culmination of many people and many long hours of work and planning ... I am grateful to everyone for their collective care and concern for the people of Guatemala." The group raised over \$38,000 in support of Common Hope.

Our friends from First Congregational Church of **Western Springs, IL** raised \$38,000 and collected medications and medical supplies worth \$7,000 to bring down on their Vision Team trip this past November. Activities included a house party where 200 family members and friends were invited to learn about Common Hope and a Platform Tennis Tournament where entrance fees were donated. Their efforts also generated 21 new Sponsors.

What You Can Do

Help spread the word — to organize an event or presentation in your area please call Mary at 651-917-0243.

A Close Call

First year of community health efforts a success

Ingrid García Cutzan is immensely proud of her boys, and well she should be. Ingrid is a young mother raising six sons on her own. Her youngest is just six years old, her eldest only 14. All six of them are charming young men—polite and sweet to each other and their mother.

The family's rented house in San Pedro is furnished with little more than a few chairs and a Christmas tree. Without a doubt this family is struggling; but through the help of a recent health fair, Ingrid and her boys were spared a devastating crisis.



Ingrid at home with five of her six sons.

cervical cancer, the most common cause of cancer-related deaths among women of reproductive age in Guatemala.* Clinic staff led educational workshops in local villages and encouraged communities to arrange for staff to return and conduct preventive screenings.

2006 was a successful first year for this effort. A total of 134 women were screened, and 13 were found to have early stages of cervical cancer. These women were treated at Common Hope or referred to other health care facilities in the area.

through Common Hope, removing the abnormal cells before they could become seriously life threatening.

The key to beating cervical cancer, of course, is to catch it early. Abnormal cells can either be cut out or frozen off relatively easily and cost effectively.

Ingrid has been through some rough times in her life—in the past, her relationship with the boys' father; in the present, her daily struggle to stretch her budget and single-handedly support her large family. Thanks to this close call, a proactive effort of the health care clinic, Ingrid has taken one more step to steady the course as she steers her family toward a better life.

*www.commonhope.org/newslinks

Common Hope's health clinic launched a brand new initiative last year—to raise awareness, screen and treat women for

Ingrid was one of the 13. After visiting her local fair she was diagnosed with early stages of cancer and received treatment

What You Can Do

A gift of **\$50** can provide cervical cancer screenings for **25** women.

MILESTONE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

in a small wooden house near the highway in a neighborhood where gangs and thieves abounded. "There were even bullet holes in the walls of the houses!" Doris recounts.

The transition to New Hope Village wasn't always smooth sailing. During the first year Doris recalls that New Hope "looked just like a desert." Her parents worked to help build the community houses, but for a time, there was no electricity or running water. "I used to have to take a candle with me if I needed to walk down to the latrines at night," she recalls.

But gradually things did improve. New families arrived, houses were connected to water and electricity, showers and flush toilets were installed. The classrooms also started to fill out, and finally the permanent New Hope School building opened to the students. Doris and her classmates moved in half-way through their fourth grade year. The

new school was "bigger, nicer, fresher," Doris says. "We used to get so hot under the lamina roofs of the old school."

For Doris the best thing about the new school was the play area. "Before there was no shade from the sun," she said. "At the new school there's a jungle gym too—we'd never had one of those before!"



Doris with her new school supplies.

In October, Doris and all 23 of her classmates graduated from the sixth grade. All 24 will go on to secondary school. Doris herself will attend the nearby Gómez Carillo Institute and says that a career as a psychologist, doctor or secretary all sound appealing.

Doris vows to work hard: "I'm grateful for the opportunities that life has given me and for the people who have helped me. I will study hard this year; I don't want to disappoint them."

U.S. Office Volunteer Group Activities

After a brief hiatus, volunteer group activities at the U.S. office are starting up once again.

MARCH 29th

6:00-8:30pm
Noche de Colores preparation
10-12 people needed (RSVP)

APRIL 19th

6:00-8:30pm
Warehouse work
12 people needed (RSVP)

MAY 31st

9:00am-1:00pm
Newsletter inserting
10-12 people needed (RSVP)

RSVP to Shannon at 651-917-0250 or email shannonb@mn.commonhope.org

He is currently working towards a primary teaching degree and ultimately dreams of going to University.

A lack of parental support can be another big obstacle to a student's education. It can be difficult for the many parents who received little formal education to be able to help with schoolwork when needed or to appreciate why their child needs to study so much. This is partly why Common Hope provides tutoring classes for students. With Common Hope's support it is not uncommon for students to graduate not only from secondary school but also University.

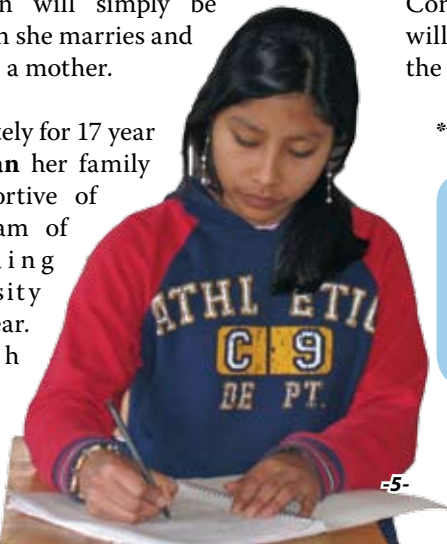


Cesar, a 21 year old from San Pedro el Alto, is just one example. Cesar plans to work by day while studying for his license in business administration by night. Not only is he studying, but he also is a member of

Espresso de Esperanza, a coffee business set up by students involved in the Common Hope youth group.

Girls encounter an extra gender barrier to overcome. Families often put less importance on a daughter's education, reasoning that an "investment" in her education will simply be lost when she marries and becomes a mother.

Fortunately for 17 year old **Lilian** her family is supportive of her dream of attending University next year. With



Common Hope's financial help, Lilian plans to study on the weekends so she can work during the week. Just like Manuel and Cesar, she is determined to make her education count. All three students gave similar reasons for studying: wanting to help their families and their younger siblings.

A Look at the Numbers

Take a closer look and it is easy to see the challenges for a student to continue high school in Guatemala.

ECONOMIC

Annual tuition: **Q500-Q600**
 Monthly income of an affiliated family: **Q500-Q1,000**
 Avg number of family members: **7**

PARENTAL

Avg years of adult education: **4.8***
 Adult illiteracy rate: **31%***

GENDER

35% of women can't read, compared to **21%** of men*
33.5% of girls enter high school, compared to **48%** of boys*

The new school term in Guatemala started in January. Although students will still face challenges, it's good to know that with Common Hope's help, affiliated students will graduate from high school at double the rate of the national average.

*www.commonhope.org/newlinks

What You Can Do

A gift of **\$40** can provide one month of tutoring sessions for two students.

Supporter Profile



Greg congratulates one of the new homeowners at New Hope Village.

Greg Scherer: A man of many hats

Arriving at New Hope Village you'll frequently catch a glimpse of Greg Scherer. He'll either be waving enthusiastically as he hangs out of a bobcat, running around with a wheelbarrow and spade, or bounding past with about six kids clinging to his ankles, chattering away in Spanglish.

Greg is one of those people that never seems to rest for a moment. He has worn many hats at Common Hope—serving as a board member, a volunteer, a speaker, a donor, and a long-time Sponsor of three students.

Since first getting involved 15 years ago, Greg has been to Guatemala at least 27 times, starting off leading Vision Teams and continuing in later years by bringing groups of friends to help with maintenance projects. In 2006 he made multiple trips, staying a few months at a time to work on projects at New Hope. There, he contributed to the planning, fundraising and building of the septic system. He also has been a key player in building and maintaining green areas, retention walls, and small shelters for other infrastructure systems.

On the U.S. side, Greg is known to lug in jars filled with coins from the Penny Challenge at his parish school. He's also been a dedicated volunteer for the Circle of Speakers, with a knack for captivating junior high audiences with his vivid descriptions of a cornstalk house in a rainstorm, making the entire classroom feel as though they were inside that house.

Greg has made a real difference in people's lives. Says Renato, New Hope Site Director, "I don't know what I would have done without Greg's hands-on support this year, as a volunteer, donor, co-worker and dear friend."

Access to Healing

The steady path toward a full recovery

For the majority of Guatemala's poor, finding access to basic health care is a struggle. For those with more serious conditions, services are often impossibly out of reach.

Take the case of **Claudia Elías Ramos**, whose hip was broken after being hit by a car in August 2001. The accident left Claudia in a coma for 20 days. During this time the presence of Common Hope staff at her side was critical in ensuring that she received the attention she so desperately needed.

Following her emergency treatment Claudia was discharged from the hospital, but her struggle was far from over. Claudia lives high up in the steep hills of Hermano Pedro, a poor and rugged area reachable only by foot. For the first six months of her recovery, Common Hope rented an apartment for her at the entrance to the village, and a driver took her to her hospital checkups.

Eventually Claudia returned home. But walking was so painful that she was essentially homebound. If Claudia hadn't been sponsored, things probably would not have improved. Fortunately Common Hope was there for the long term.

Her social worker arranged for schoolwork to be sent home and for Armando, Common Hope's physical therapist, to work with her. Armando linked Claudia to our network

of orthopedics, therapists, and volunteer surgeons (see sidebar) who could provide her the help she needed. Through these collective and sustained efforts, Claudia received a full hip replacement last summer.

After the surgery, Claudia made a goal to walk to her junior high graduation—and this fall she did just that. She is "feeling good!" and excited to start high school in January. Claudia's story is a poignant example of a crucial resource Common Hope provides: access to a network of health care so that injury or minor illnesses can be healed before they become chronic disabilities.

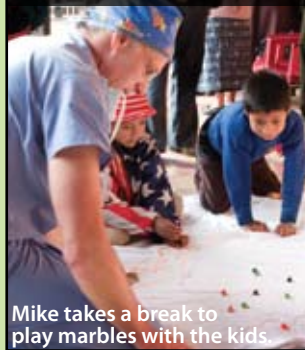


Claudia and Armando, her physical therapist.

Thanks to the students at Sacred Heart School from Minnesota, Claudia has been sponsored since 1996. Their support gave Claudia access to services that made full recovery possible.

Mike Menzel and Kathy Iverson have been bringing surgical teams to Guatemala for the past fifteen years. Their group, now known as Medical Miracles, has steadily grown since the first trip. Twenty-one teams have traveled to Guatemala since 2000.

Medical Miracles



Mike takes a break to play marbles with the kids.

Team members generously donate their vacation time and travel expenses to work with patients like Claudia, identified through Common Hope and several other local social service agencies. An estimated 525 operations have been performed since 1992, transforming the lives of patients who otherwise would not have had access to medical care.

Some people have recently asked for a way to honor Mike and Kathy for their years of committed service. The twosome believe that giving a gift in their honor to Common Hope, to be used where it is needed most, would be the greatest recognition they could receive. You can learn more on the Medical Miracles website (www.guatemalasuregery.org).

Margarita in the Common Hope kitchen.



Gratitude of a Mother

One mother gives back

Our families in Guatemala are working hard to overcome the challenges presented by poverty. Some people, however, go above and beyond our expectations. **Margarita Azucena** is one such example. Last summer Margarita offered her one week annual vacation from her regular job as a cook at the national hospital to work as a volunteer in our kitchen.

Margarita and her husband Nicolas have four children. In January their oldest son, nineteen year old Omar, will start a university night course in information system engineering and computer sciences. Margarita explained that Omar was affiliated in 1999 during a particularly difficult time for her:

"Common Hope has helped me a great deal with my son ... I'd always wanted to come and work to say thanks but there wasn't ever anyone to look after the children. Then, this year Omar graduated from High School—and I knew I needed to finally do it!"

Thank you Margarita for your service!

What You Can Do

Follow Margarita's lead and donate your vacation time to join a Vision Team. Call Shannon at 651-917-0250 for more info.

20th Anniversary Photos



Notes from a Board Director 20th Anniversary Celebration

By Tom Joyce

This past November I was privileged to participate in Common Hope's 20th Anniversary Celebration in Guatemala. It was my first visit to the country in two years and I came away totally re-energized for the work of Common Hope. There were many exciting events as part of the celebration.



Tom shakes hands with a graduate.

That first evening there was a party at the Antigua site to honor John Huebsch. It was moving to see the deep affection and esteem for John, or Juan Antonio. The following evening there was a reception at San José el Viejo, an old church ruins in Antigua. Many friends of Common Hope gathered

to celebrate. Tamalyn Gutierrez, our new Country Director, spoke beautifully in Spanish and English about our work.

The next day our group journeyed to New Hope Village for a ceremony to honor the recent high school graduates. Our sense of being in a different society was heightened when the bus broke down on the way to New Hope. The hills are even steeper on foot. When we did arrive I was thrilled to see the new school, which had just started construction on my last visit. Renato Westby and his team have much to be proud of.

Complete with entertainment, the ceremony was accompanied by lunch, during which visitors were privileged to join graduates, their families, and several families who recently earned title to their homes. The

families' fierce pride in the achievements of the graduates and their gratitude to Common Hope were humbling to me.

The capstone of the visit was the Antigua ceremony to honor graduates. Many families were seated in their best clothes, having traveled long distances. More than 100 graduates marched in. The leaders of the education program and three graduates Carmen Salazar, Cesar Vicente, and Emiliana Pérez addressed us all, and María José Castillo performed several songs. Finally, a few of us had the honor of giving gifts to each graduate as their names were announced.



Photo Exhibit at San José el Viejo.

The 20th Anniversary Celebration underlines the core educational mission of Common Hope. I left rededicated to the work.

Common Hope Receives Charity Navigator's Highest Honor



For the second year in a row, Charity Navigator, America's premier charity evaluator, has given Common Hope their 4-star, "exceptional" rating. Only 12% of charities have received two consecutive 4-star evaluations, "indicating that Common Hope outperforms most charities in America in its efforts to operate in the most fiscally responsible way possible," says Trent Stamp, Executive Director of Charity Navigator.

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Noche de Colores

The sights and sounds of Guatemala are returning on Friday, April 27th to the International Market Square in Minneapolis for a unique benefit for Common Hope. Together, we will celebrate Common Hope's good work and continue building our future. Rick Kupchella from KARE 11 will be our emcee.

Please join old friends and new at this exciting event. Invitations will be mailed to a regional list in late February. All are welcome; contact us for additional invitations. Find out more at (www.commonhope.org/newslinks).

Rotaries Spark Stove Donations

With the help of the Antigua Rotary, Common Hope received two very generous donations of stoves this fall. In partnership with the Alameda Rotary, the rotary donated 105 stoves. And with Betsy and Jacques Dalies, former general manager for Nestle Guatemala, they donated 31 efficient cookers, which are like non-electric crockpots.

Common Hope's stove program is implemented in partnership with Helps, International. Families work community service hours to earn a stove, which uses firewood much more efficiently than open fires and greatly reduces illnesses due to smoke inhalation.

