



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.

Fall 2008

Teacher Vicki Alvarez Caruz helps students at the pilot school. For full story, see page 4.



COMMON HOPE NEWS

A focus on quality

Regional study reinforces need for quality education

The results of a recent comparative study of student performance in Latin America show that primary school children in Guatemala are trailing behind their peers, displaying major deficiencies in the areas of math and language. Cuba gained the highest scores while Guatemala was placed in the lowest grouping, slightly ahead of the Dominican Republic.

While the results reflect the huge challenges facing Guatemala, they should not overshadow the considerable progress that has been made. A significant milestone for Guatemalan education was reached in 2007 with the launch of a new base curriculum by the Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), which clearly outlines the need for schools to adopt creative teaching methods and promote critical thinking skills among students. This takes a definitive step toward changes that Common Hope has long been implementing and promoting and is an opportunity for Common Hope to support schools in getting there.

Common Hope launched an Education Quality Task Force in 2007 in part to identify the best way to incorporate the curriculum changes into our own educational programming. **Katherine Onorato**, a former education mentor and long-term volunteer at New Hope School, was contracted last October to conduct a review of our education programs organization-wide and provide recommendations for new educational initiatives, given the curriculum changes. By February of this year, the task force created an Educational Quality Beliefs Statement to further focus our program development. The task force emphasized improving teacher quality as a key

FOCUS ON QUALITY continues on page 6

A model graduate

Wesley Alberto already gives back



Common Hope has three outcomes we hope our affiliates achieve. First, that affiliated students graduate from high school or a vocational equivalent. Second, that they possess critical thinking skills. And finally, that they possess the confidence, compassion and organizational skills to become agents of change in their communities. **Wesley Alberto Rodriguez Perez** has achieved these outcomes and more.

MODEL GRADUATE continues on page 7

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HONORING TEACHERS

I am not a teacher, but an awakener. –Robert Frost



It's impossible for us to know which child has the potential to become the next doctor who gives back to his community by serving abandoned elderly patients, or the teacher who nurtures her students by building their confidence and belief in themselves, or the social worker who teaches positive parenting skills to families.

It's much more important that each child discover for themselves who they will become. Good teachers understand that.

At Common Hope we believe in maximizing the potential of each student, recognizing that their aspirations and the support required to reach each of them may be different. We promote values essential to good citizenship, including tolerance and compassion, and our programs enable each student to become a functional individual and competent adult in their community.

"It's much more important that each child discover for themselves who they will become. Good teachers understand that."

Our teachers model these beliefs every day.

Each of us may remember a teacher who changed our lives – someone who inspired us to achieve what we didn't think was possible, or who demanded of us the excellence we were capable of delivering, or who simply introduced us to music or literature that we grew to love.

Ms. Pickett. Mr. Baird. Mr. Maben. They impacted me the most. Take just a moment to think about who inspired you...

For the third grade students at our Pilot School, they may look back and remember their teacher Vicki as the person who ignited the spark within them (*see article on page 4*). For others, like Wesley Alberto in our cover story, it will be their parents, who believed in their future despite the challenges of their every day lives. And for many, it will be the Sponsor that encouraged their studies from thousands of miles away.

Did you think of someone?

Please consider making a gift in their honor to help another student awaken their ability to dream big.

Shari
Gratefully

Shari Blindt
Executive Director

All walks of life working together

Partnership with The MESSAGE Program delivers for a family in need



Flor and her mother Doña Pascuala along with Felix, Charlie, Mario, Narciso, and Pablo.

Common Hope has been fortunate to collaborate with many good organizations over the years, helping us to do more, better. In recent months The MESSAGE Program, a medical supply nonprofit, has provided invaluable support to our in-kind shipping program. Karin Reichensberger, director of the program and a former long-term volunteer for Common Hope, has trained our shipping staff and helped to facilitate the paperwork at the customs office in Guatemala City to get two recent container shipments processed more quickly.

In turn, Common Hope was able to provide support to The MESSAGE Program for a unique case. The individual was Flor, a young woman who suffers from a very rare and debilitating condition known as Elephantiasis, or Neurofibrome, which

causes the body's extremities to swell to huge proportions. Flor's mother Doña Pascuala cares for her, but she herself suffers from diabetes and chronic bronchitis. Their rural home, built of little more than cornstalks and a tin roof over a dirt floor, only accentuated the situation. Flor's condition made it impossible for her to use footwear, and she had developed ulcers on her feet. There was a glaring need for more hygienic living conditions.

The MESSAGE Program raised funds for the cost of the floor and other materials, Common Hope donated the prefabricated house, and Common Hope's construction staff volunteered their time. Along with Karin and a friend, the group assembled the house—dodging some rather large and poisonous spiders as they worked! What's more, volunteer firefighters from two local villages helped to clear the land and lay a concrete foundation. "During the process we also had over 30 little kids from the community swarming us and pitching in with various tasks," says Karin.

The new, clean home will make a tremendous difference for Flor's health. The door to her room was built extra wide to enable a hospital bed to fit through. In addition, the MESSAGE Program was able to arrange for Flor to come to the Common Hope clinic so that US surgeons could treat her ulcers and our dentist could treat a tooth infection. This project was a great reminder of the results that can be accomplished by a group of people from all walks of life working together—something Vision Teams demonstrate every day.

Best Buy's WOLF program joins a Vision Team

This summer a team sponsored by Best Buy's Women's Leadership Forum, or WOLF, traveled to Guatemala on a Vision Team. Eleven employees participated, primarily store and district managers from southeastern US, with the addition of two members from Best Buy corporate headquarters.

Team members were very busy before they left, collecting a number of in-kind technology supplies from Best Buy stores, including two TVs, projectors, cds, and dvds. A particularly fun-loving crowd, the group kept very busy while in Guatemala, building a house for an affiliated family, going on social work visits, and leading a number of activities with students—including cooking, soccer games, blanket making, and a reading hour.

WOLF, a program designed to create leaders through hands-on experience, is based on three main pillars: commitment, networking and giving back. "We got

involved with Common Hope because its mission is a natural fit with the pillars of WOLF," says Angela Chambliss, Project Manager of Network Partnerships of Best Buy. "Through this partnership, employees contributed to the cultural transformation of the company and the world while impacting the lives of people in need," Angela said.

The team had a very enthusiastic response to their experience. "We were exposed to the incredible work that Common Hope is doing," said Bernard Vieira, Store Services Manager of Best Buy in Cutler Bay, Florida. "Innocent kids showed us that even in the face of daunting adversity, the human spirit burns bright. We returned to our homes and offices fundamentally and essentially changed."



A big thank you to Best Buy for sponsoring the team, and to all of the team members for your hard work and enthusiasm!

You can check out a photo diary of the team's trip on our website. Click on the Photo Diary button on our homepage.

Supporter Profile



Warehouse whiz

For six years, **Bob Karlstrand** has been an extremely dedicated and capable warehouse volunteer. Bob was the mastermind of our recent warehouse reorganization, consolidating its contents by 50 percent and efficiently packing palettes with supplies in order to fill every last inch of two recent containers. Since April he has spent over 220 hours getting our warehouse whipped into shape for the container shipments.

We always await Bob's arrival in the spring, when he breezes in from his travel adventures in Latin America or Southeast Asia. Retired from a career in the insurance industry, Bob has spent the last eight winters traveling internationally. It was shortly before he left for a trip to Guatemala in 2002 that Bob read about Common Hope in a local newspaper. He decided to visit the St. Paul office to learn about our work, and started volunteering in the warehouse before he even left.

Once in Guatemala, Bob stopped at the Antigua site and ended up putting his skills to work there—for eight months. He mostly built houses but also helped out in the library and the bodega, or warehouse. The next year when Bob traveled to Ecuador, he took a detour to return to Guatemala and volunteer with Common Hope for another six weeks.

"Bob is the kind of volunteer who can work independently, one we can trust to put others to work," says Louise Lundgren, volunteer manager. "He increases our efficiency tremendously, saving us the expense of a part-time staff position. We are so fortunate to have his help."

When asked why he volunteers for Common Hope, Bob says "I believe in the work. They're trying to do what they can to help people out of poverty. I think it's evolved over the years to get a more focused mission. They've helped a lot of people. The people I built houses for, they seemed truly happy to be improving their home."



A day in the life

Guatemala recently celebrated the Day of the Teacher, recognizing the contributions of this profession. In this series, we thought it fitting to highlight the life of a teacher at the Antigua site.

Vicki Enoé Alvarez Carcuz is a third grade teacher at the Antigua site pilot school. Her days start as that of most mothers, getting her son Eliab ready for school before hurrying off to work by 7am.

Vicki teaches third grade at our Antigua Pilot School and has 14 students in her class. She started working for Common Hope in 2006, joining our Pilot School staff to work with children who had struggled in school, often due to difficulties related to behavioral, emotional, and medical challenges.

Like the other teachers at the school, the bond between Vicki and her students is quite evident. Many of the students endure difficult living conditions, so she has concern for not only their intellectual but also emotional health. "I think that you stop seeing them as students to an extent and feel like they're your own children," says Vicki. For Vicki, building her student's confidence is key. "I want them to understand that their challenges aren't going to stop them, that they can overcome them."

After morning classes at the Pilot School, Vicki and the other teachers split up and head to local community schools, where they provide tutoring classes for other affiliated primary students. For Vicki this means jumping



Vicki's Daily Schedule

5:45 am	Vicki starts her day. She prepares breakfast for her son Eliab.
6:40am	Vicki drops Eliab off at school.
7:00am	Vicki's work day begins. She waits for the children to arrive, and helps them cross the road safely.
7:30am	Students help to tidy the room and get settled.
7:45am	Teaching starts.
9:30am	Recess — the children go out to play.
10:00am	Snack — the school provides a healthy snack for each child, then all the kids brush their teeth.
10:15am	Back to classes.
12:00pm	Classes end. Students help to tidy the room while Vicki tries to fit in some grading.
12:15pm	Vicki and the other teachers supervise as the children load buses to head home to local villages.
1:45pm	Lunchtime, sometimes used to do grading.
2:00pm	Vicki heads to the community school
2:30pm	Teaching begins. Vicki groups the students by grade and helps them with any homework they have received.
4:15pm	Breaktime for the children.
4:30pm	Vicki's class unites with that of a fellow Common Hope teacher, Mateo. Together they organize a joint activity for the children.
5:00pm	Classes end.
5:10pm	Vicki drives home to take care of any chores before going to pick up Eliab from her sister's house.
6:30pm	Vicki arrives at her sister's house. Together they work on his homework.
8:00pm	Vicki prepares dinner for Eliab, her sister and nephews.
8:45pm	Eliab and Vicki head home
9:00pm	Bedtime for Eliab. Vicki prepares for the next work day.
11:30pm	Bedtime!

of the Teacher to honor the s spirit, and as the new US school year t a teacher serving sponsored students.

on her motorbike and heading up the steep, winding road that leads to the community of El Guardiania el Hato.

Here, inside a bright orange two-story building perched on the steep hillside, Vicki provides tutoring classes for 15 children from two schools. "It gives me great pleasure to help them understand a concept, finish their homework, or feel prepared for a test. I want them to have a sense of security, that if they just follow the steps they can do anything," she says.

Vicki's day officially ends at 5pm, although sometimes there is still homework to be graded, or classroom preparation to be done. After that she jumps on her motorbike and heads home to help her own son with his homework. "It's a long day," Vicki admits, "but it comes with the territory, it's in the vocation. I've always wanted to be a teacher—working with children just fascinates me."

Help Vicki and our other teachers and students prepare for the 2009 school year. Visit our website, or search for Common Hope on the Target Lists for Teachers (www.target.com/lists/find), to view a list of needed supplies.

Tech Teachers

Introducing our new team of Superusers



Lisa-Marie, Jorge, Lucía, Francisco, Brenda, Elmer, Nineth, and Patty.

This July a newly created team of computer trainers, called Superusers, delivered their very first round of workshops to their fellow employees. Nine different classes were offered, ranging from computer basics to PowerPoint to Common Hope's database, used to manage information for more than 2,700 children and their families.

Forty-two employees from all departments took advantage of this opportunity. For some it was their first computer class ever. Common Hope's maintenance manager, **Fernando Santos**, signed up for the computer basics, Outlook and Internet courses. "They really helped me to get over my fear of using a computer," he said. "I'm already considering which ones I'll do next!"

Currently, 15 members of staff from different departments form the Superuser Team. Under the leadership of systems manager **Pablo Cermeno** and long-term volunteer **Lisa-Marie Bruce**, who has managed such training initiatives in the US, the Superusers first received training in a variety of computer applications before going on to develop their own teaching manuals and study practical teaching skills.

In June, **Lucía Estacuy** took over as the program coordinator and led the group as they launched the workshops. "This course has been an opportunity to learn many skills," says Lucia. "We have had to learn and teach at the same time. It has been a great challenge for me, bearing in mind that I've never taught, but the training I received along with my colleagues enabled me to feel secure—and excited to know that we're responsible for sharing knowledge!"

For the Superusers, this is just the beginning. During the next six months it is hoped that all Common Hope employees will have an opportunity to receive computer training, with a long-term goal of extending this training to affiliated families as well.

What you can do

Common Hope spends \$1,500 each month for Internet services in Guatemala. If you can help, give a gift to the technology fund.

Focus on quality continued from page 1



means of improving outcomes for affiliated students, as well as influencing education quality more broadly in Guatemala.

Education staff members are now focusing on practical implementation strategies. They have, for example, initiated bimonthly visits to local secondary schools, a practice they will soon begin with primary schools, in order to strengthen relationships and lines of communication. This will improve

our ability to monitor both student progress and school standards, and it will allow us to better support these schools where necessary.

The staff has also implemented standardized testing. At New Hope, assessments were initiated this February when 147 students at key transitions took standard tests for reading and math, which will be repeated at the end of the school year. Not only will the results provide real tools with which to measure student progress, but it will also help staff to see the value of these measuring tools, which are new for most Guatemalan educators.

And finally, Common Hope has partnered with a local initiative, *Estemos Listos*, or Let's Be Ready, which specializes in teacher training programs for local public schools. Started by **Fred Zambroski**, former long-term volunteer, the initiative employs a team of local teachers who give the trainings.

Over the years, Common Hope has built a solid foundation of comprehensive support for families that makes it possible for them to send their kids to school. We have figured out how to provide *access* to education very effectively. Now we have the opportunity to affect more deeply the *quality* of that education.

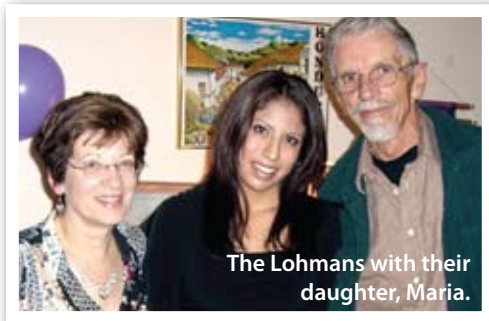
The national curriculum mandate provides a great opportunity to do this. Guatemalan schools have been primed for change, and Common Hope is in a place to provide the support schools need to create the changes. Together, we can work to identify the most effective ways to help boost the standards of education throughout Guatemala.

What you can do

Become a Common Hope Partner for Education, and your gift will be matched, dollar for dollar by a generous supporter.

Coming full circle

Bob and Carolyn Lohman's journey to legacy giving



The Lohmans with their daughter, Maria.

Of their first visit to the Antigua site, Bob and Carolyn Lohman distinctly remember Tom McCullough, a volunteer carpenter and mechanic, and the beautiful doors he was making at the time. A carpenter

himself, Bob was very impressed with the quality of construction at the Family Development Center – as was Carolyn. They say it showed them that the center was a place built to last. As Bob put it, “It’s important for people to come to a place that doesn’t look like what they left [cornstalk homes].”

In part it is this sense of quality and longevity that spurred Bob and Carolyn to become legacy givers. Given their confidence that the organization will be around for a long time, the Lohmans felt a substantial gift made sense. They started with a lead trust, because they wanted to do something that would give money to be used today. They have also set up a charitable remainder trust and have put Common Hope in their will.

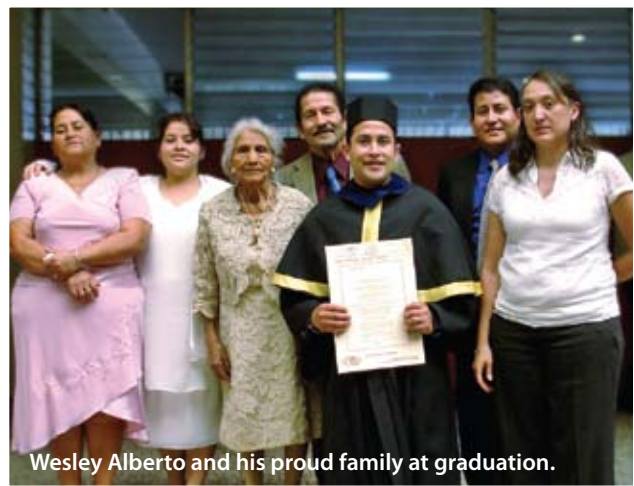
Bob’s first inklings of philanthropy came when he was a young boy accompanying his father on medical visits. A doctor, his father took care of people living along the railroad tracks in Iowa.

Bob remembers asking on one of these visits, “How come they have a dirt floor and we have linoleum?” His dad told him the families were “too frivolous with their money and hadn’t worked hard enough.” Yet Bob was spurred to find other reasons. He concluded instead that he has a real responsibility to give back. As Bob puts it, “We owe other people something. We have what we have because others don’t. It’s not a decision whether or not to share with them; it’s just what we should do.”

Bob and Carolyn have a particular connection to Central America in that they adopted their daughter, now 20 years old, from Honduras. They have sponsored two students in Guatemala through another organization for many years and thus travel fairly regularly to Central America. Their daughter has done some service work in Guatemala as well. To them, Common Hope’s work in Guatemala is distinct in its empowerment of people, such as having the Guatemalan staff becoming leaders of the programs. They also appreciate the emphasis on education as a way to solve problems, like the adage of teaching people to fish instead of giving them a fish for today. Concludes Carolyn, “Common Hope is a sustainable, long-term, future-oriented project for change.”

If you have already named Common Hope in your will or estate plan, please let us know so we can welcome you to the Legacy Circle! Contact Joanne at 651-917-0243 or joaneg@us.commonhope.org.

Wesley continued from page 1



Wesley Alberto and his proud family at graduation.

The son of a construction foreman from the nearby village of San Juan del Obispo, Wesley became affiliated with Common Hope in 1996 when he entered junior high. Twelve years later this July, Wesley graduated from the University of San Carlos as a medical doctor and surgeon.

From the physical challenge of 24- to 36-hour shifts as an intern, to the mental and

emotional challenges of the work, Wesley’s achievement demanded a great deal over the course of the seven years it took to complete his degree.

His humble background led to some degree of discrimination, yet he was driven by “the love that my family gave me, especially my mother, and the dream of seeing the joy in her eyes on the day I graduated,” he says. Wesley was also motivated by an obvious heart for the work.

“The first day I visited a hospital and entered an operating room,” he says, “I knew that being a doctor would be my vocation, my destiny. ... I’ve been in love with what I do ever since.”

So when a close friend, **Dr. Guillermo Arreaga**, founded a charitable home for abandoned elderly people (**Asociación**

Senilia, which roughly translates as the Wellness Association) Wesley quickly committed to support the effort. “It struck me as a very noble mission,” he says. “Most of these people have some sort of physical, mental or social disability, which prevents them from being accepted into other homes. That’s why I dedicate my time and effort to help it grow.”

Wesley is volunteering full-time at the association, and plans to continue to volunteer there even after he begins full-time work. When asked what drove him to give back to the community, Wesley responded, “this was something I learned here, at Common Hope.”

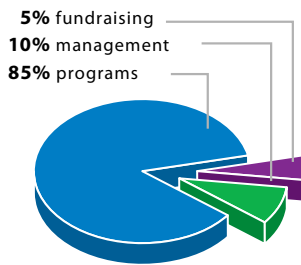
What you can do

Give a gift to the university scholarship fund to support dreams like Wesley’s.



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Coming soon...

Look for Common Hope's gift catalog to arrive in your mailbox in mid-November to help you find great alternative gifts for the upcoming holiday season.