



Antigua Family Development Center, 1997

# COMMON HOPE NEWS

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Target gives back

## 25 years ago, families living in poverty dared to voice big hopes for change. Today, many of those hopes have been made real.

Back in 1986, the year our work began, Guatemala was embroiled in a civil war that had already raged for two and a half decades. Young Guatemalans never knew life without it—to a Guatemalan child, vigilance and unpredictability were as normal as cartoons and Frosted Flakes for an American kid.

### Uncertain future, deficit of dreams

Poverty was everywhere, starkly more widespread than in other Central American countries. More than 70 percent of Guatemalans lived on less than \$2 a day. Children might have attended a couple of years of school, but beyond that, education was for the privileged few.

With an uncertain future, young Guatemalans could be most sure of two things: a future of sweating in the coffee fields, or an early death in the war.

“People had lost their ability to dream,” says Tamalyn Gutierrez, Country Director for Common Hope. “Life, especially for those who lived in extreme poverty, was all about survival.”



Doña Licha saw her health care and housing improve over her years with Common Hope.

Carlos Robles (second from left) at a film workshop put on by the Arcadia Foundation.



## Graduate creates films about important social issues

**Twelve years ago, Carlos Robles was a junior high student unsure of what he wanted to do with his life. Today, he is a film-maker whose projects have caught the attention of Central American and international film critics alike.**

Even at an early age, Carlos Robles was interested in film. “When I was very young, I would look at the television and ask myself, how is it that there are people inside there? That was when I became curious about television and movies,” he says.

Carlos’s family placed a lot of importance on education, so he says they would have done everything they could to keep him in school. But paying for school was a continual challenge. Joining Common Hope in 1998, he says, was “a great help.”

### Carlos’s impossible dream

With Common Hope, Carlos was able to finish junior high, graduate high school, and continue on to university. His dream was to study film. Yet when he started university, the options for film were slim.

“During the civil war, art was dead in Guatemala, or at least very clandestine,”

says Carlos. “After the signing of the peace accords in 1996, there was an explosion of NGOs in Guatemala.” An NGO called Casa Comal was one, which created a film school in 2006.

Carlos had begun studying marketing, but he was having a difficult time settling on his second choice career path.

“During the civil war, art was dead in Guatemala, or at least very clandestine.”

Then, he spotted a newspaper ad for the school, started by Guatemalans who had studied film in Cuba. “I still have the ad, I kept it,” he says with a smile.

### A hope made real

Starting school in 2007 and graduating in 2010, Carlos has worked on a variety of television and short film projects. Some of the films have dealt with controversial topics, such as HIV/AIDS, religion, and gender equality. “I want what people watch

to become something they can talk about later,” he says.

And people are talking. A film Carlos and his classmates made about religion won first prize in the Central American short film category at the Icaro Film Festival last year. Another short film he worked on, about gender equality, received an honorable mention.

### Paying it forward

Currently, Carlos is doing freelance work, including a few short films for Common Hope. He is also shooting his first feature-length film, about child trafficking in Guatemala.

Carlos knows his dream wouldn’t have happened without Common Hope. “Such an expensive degree wouldn’t have been possible,” he says. He is especially happy to have a chance to share his professional skills with Common Hope.

“For me, it’s great to be able to give back [to Common Hope], so that maybe someone else can receive the same support later on. I think it’s important to share what you have received.”

As a part of our 25th anniversary celebration, Carlos will create several short films that will highlight people whose lives have been changed by Common Hope. Look for his films in upcoming eNews and on our website.

# Long-term volunteers return for a visit after many years away

As part of Common Hope's 25th anniversary celebration, a group of former volunteers who worked with Common Hope for a year or more returned to Guatemala to see what has changed over the years. Below are some reflections and observations from them:

"We were here during the construction, and 16 years has brought a lot of growth." —Jennifer Schulte Rogan, Common Hope volunteer from 1995-1996

"What impresses me about this organization is how it continually re-focuses its efforts on helping kids graduate from school and it also attends to the basic things in the kid's life that will

help that process." —Zach Thomas, who volunteered with his wife Sally from 1997-2002 and has sponsored sixteen-year old Shirley Pamal for about six years.

"I am so grateful that I am able to give back to a project that I really believe in. My days of volunteering were so long ago, but it's nice to be such an integral part of it still." —Jennifer Schulte Rogan, who sponsors nine-year old Anita del Rosario García.



## MAKE A HOPE REAL

Mirna Gabriela, age 8, lives with her family in the mountains of San Felipe. Her home, which has sheet metal walls and a dirt floor, is in poor condition. Mirna studies in the 4th grade and has already surpassed the education of her mother, who only studied through 3rd grade. To achieve her dream of becoming a secretary, Mirna will need to graduate high school. With Common Hope, Mirna will get support for her education, and her family can make improvements to their home.

To sponsor Mirna, visit [www.bit.ly/mirna8](http://www.bit.ly/mirna8) or call Jessie at 651.287.0727.

To read stories of other children who need sponsors, visit [commonhope.org](http://commonhope.org).



## Dared to hope continued from page 1

It was into this world that Common Hope arrived and began inspiring hope—educating children, opening clinics, and building homes. Children began to stay in school well beyond the typical age, and young adults began professional careers.

### New clinic, new homes, high school graduates

Doña María Bonifacia, a resident of San Pedro las Huertas her whole life, remembers clearly how the village used to be. "Everything was dirt, all the houses were made of cornstalk," she says. "People were so poor."

Over the years, however, María saw the quality of life improve for San Pedro residents, the majority of whom made their living in the fields. With the help of Common Hope, sons and daughters of fieldworkers began to graduate high school and become accountants, secretaries, and teachers.

María attributes many of these changes to the support of Common Hope over the years. "I have seen it in my own children," she says. "Without the support of Common Hope, my daughter wouldn't have graduated high school."

Doña Licha, another long-time San Pedro resident, remembers the scarcity of doctors in the early days. "When we were sick, we had to go to the national hospital, two bus rides from San Pedro. A closer Antigua clinic would have been very expensive. When Common Hope came, we could

come here to a doctor we could afford," says Licha.

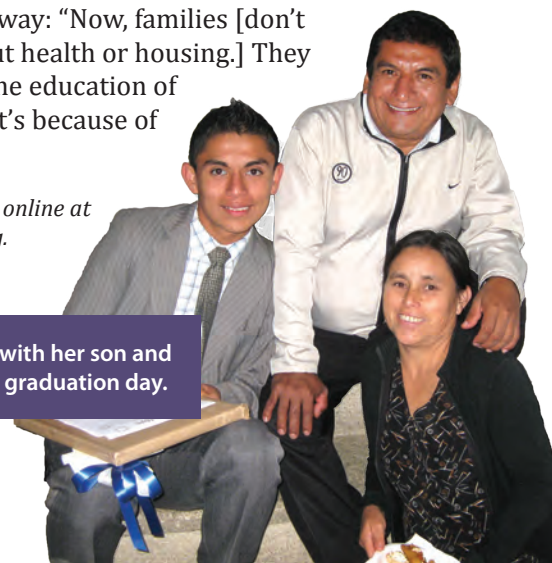
Licha was also able to improve her housing with the help of Common Hope. The family moved out of their cornstalk house into a *fibrolit* house they still live in today, and Licha cooks on an energy-efficient stove that routes harmful woodsmoke out of the house. Both of these improvements Licha earned by working sweat-equity hours years ago. "Common Hope has helped me in everything," she says. "The help is really a blessing. We hope it will continue to grow."

### Homing in on education

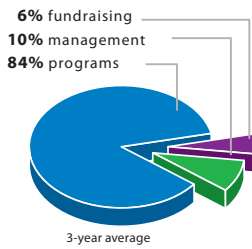
Doña Flory, whose family has partnered with Common Hope for over 15 years, explains how her community has changed in another way: "Now, families [don't worry so much about health or housing.] They worry more about the education of their children. And it's because of Common Hope."

More historical photos online at [www.commonhope.org](http://www.commonhope.org).

Doña Flory, with her son and husband on graduation day.



## USE OF FUNDS



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# Partner school directors and teachers meet with Common Hope staff to create 3-year plans for greater student success

In 2010, three public schools in the Antigua Valley had a chance to picture and plan for a brighter future for their students. School directors and teachers from San Rafael, Santa Catarina, and San Miguel sat down with Common Hope education staff to create strategic plans for the next three years.

The schools focused on the achievements they want students to be making, and specific steps that teachers and administrators can take to help students get there. All schools emphasized three areas: increasing attendance, promoting school values, and measuring academic readiness.

Tracking attendance more closely will help teachers to encourage better attendance among kids who are missing. School values, like respect and accountability, will build a stronger school culture. And measuring

academic readiness, testing children in key grades, will help gauge the success of the school's new initiatives.

Many of these strategies will put the schools, and their students, ahead of their peers. "It is really rare for schools in Guatemala to go through this process," explains Renato Westby, who heads up the school partner initiative. "Now, instead of just hoping for the best, these schools have a real vision for the future and strategic steps to get there."

This work with the schools is the latest result of years of research and relationship building, completed by Renato Westby and his team of education promoters. Says Renato, "It's really exciting to see what was just a good idea several years ago, become a reality."

## Target grant hits bullseye



Common Hope welcomed team members from Target-Guatemala to our Antigua site this January. The Target team brought games and snacks for Antigua preschoolers, and a generous \$25,000 check for our New Hope Early Childhood Initiative. Target has funded Common Hope since 2005, giving a total

of \$85,000 to our education programming, along with thousands of dollars in school supplies.

Tamalyn Gutierrez and Shari Blindt were there to receive the check. Susana Juarez from Target spoke about how important giving back is to Target, and how happy they are to support successful programs like Common Hope, the first NGO to be supported by Target-Guatemala.

Tamalyn spoke about how much we value the Target-Common Hope partnership, and what a big difference it has made to furthering our work.

*Photo: Shari Blindt accepts the grant from Target.*