



commonhope

SPRING 2020 NEWSLETTER



Education as a way forward.
Fighting poverty with diplomas.



FROM THE DESK OF SHARI BLINDT



Dear friends,

The heart of Common Hope's work is education, and we involve the entire family to make that possible for their children. In this issue of our newsletter we share with you the breadth of our work in education—how barriers our students face are eliminated as they work to achieve their dream of high school graduation. With our holistic approach their families have access to all of our programs in health care, family development, and housing as long as their children continue in school. Your generous support makes this all possible.



You've likely heard, "no one can ever take away your education" or "education is an investment that will serve you for your lifetime." And if you're like me, you may have used them in talking with your children about the importance of school. They are certainly true, and on a recent trip to Guatemala I understood infinitely more just how true they are.

"My seatmate was an elderly *caballero*, whose traditional hat was on the seat between us."

My seatmate was an elderly *caballero*, whose traditional hat was on the seat between us. We greeted each other when I first sat down, but for much of the flight I had my nose buried in a book I couldn't put down—my favorite indulgence on early morning flights. Just before landing the flight attendant gave each of us our immigration forms, and he motioned for me to help him fill out his document. The type is very small, so I assumed he couldn't read the fine print. It wasn't until he opened his passport and I noticed the thumb print for his signature that I realized he couldn't read or write. Together we filled out his information, explaining to him in my simple Spanish what each field was requesting and then filling in each of his answers for him.

I continue to think about this gentleman, and how reliant he must be on others for so much in his life. He was traveling alone and had to trust a complete stranger with his immigration information—that's a vulnerability that would strike fear in most of us, and he lives it every day.

"...that's a vulnerability that would strike fear in most of us, and he lives it every day."

It's why Common Hope's work is so important—the ability to read and write empowers a person to be informed and make the best decisions for themselves and their families. Thank you for giving so generously to make education a reality for the children we serve.

Education is truly the gift that keeps on giving for a lifetime.

With gratitude,

Shari Blindt
Executive Director



Often in Guatemala, elderly men are referred to as *caballeros*, or gentlemen. It is typical to see them wearing a traditional Guatemalan-style cowboy hat.



Understanding the existing culture of education is where the work begins. Common Hope is proud of its commitment to being a learning organization. As such, it's our work to keep a pulse on the evolving educational environment in Guatemala. Today's challenges include low promotion and graduation rates, rote learning in the classroom, and more. Together, we are working to create change and tap the power of education.

PROMOTION & GRADUATION RATES

In Guatemala, only 32% of students complete junior high. **Nationally, just 18.6% graduate from high school, as compared to 84.6% in the U.S.**

GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

By law, school attendance is only required through 6th grade, or between the ages of 7 and 14. Public spending on education as a share of GDP was reported at 2.8% in 2017 according to the World Bank as compared to 38% in the U.S.

EDUCATION FOR WOMEN & GIRLS

Women, especially young indigenous women, face the greatest barriers to education. The average years of school attended by women is 4.1 years and 3.5 for indigenous women.

RURAL & INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Public schools are often sparsely located in rural areas leaving indigenous populations vastly underserved in overpopulated classrooms.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Early Childhood Education in Guatemala is rare. One-in-three children fail first grade. Many have never seen or held a book or pencil until their first day of school.

RESOURCES & TECHNOLOGY

It's estimated that fewer than 15% of public schools possess the basic facilities needed for teaching and learning. Many face infrastructure challenges, overcrowded classrooms, and a severe lack of educational technology.

TEACHERS

Although the Guatemalan Ministry of Education supports a progressive, globalized curriculum teachers are often not trained in delivery or supplied with the necessary materials. A study by the Council on Hemispheric Affairs revealed that 80% of teachers can't pass the tests they give to their own students.

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EDUCATION PROGRAM

the  of the Common Hope model

At the heart of Common Hope's holistic model is education. Built on the fundamental belief that an education can end the cycle of poverty, Common Hope has supported the education of tens-of-thousands of students since 1986. Today, Common Hope celebrates success—Common Hope students graduate at three and four times the national average.

What started as a commitment to providing school supplies and school fee payments, has grown to a robust approach across ages, communities, and individual needs. **The Education Program of 2020 is organized in three key areas of focus: The Education Core, Education Resources, and Education Support.** By creating a well-rounded approach, Common Hope is able to meet students where they are and provide a system of interventions to ensure their success.

The goal is clear: GRADUATION. **Common Hope's philosophy is rooted in the belief that if a family is committed to keeping their child in school until graduation, they can end a generational cycle of poverty.**



Jovita (pictured right) with her sister and parents at their university graduation ceremony

Education – a mom's commitment

JOVITA AMALIA TAY, COMMON HOPE CLASS OF 2006

Imagine a scenario where your parents don't want you to go to school. Even more to the point, a scenario where your parents don't think you *need* to go to school because it would not be valuable to you as a female. Imagine that your parents believed your only job in this world was to be a mother and a wife, and getting an education—any level of education—would not be valuable to your work.

For most people, this is unimaginable. But this is the experience that María Francisca Chocoj Yucute lived.

María, grew up in a scenario, like many older Guatemalans, where her parents did not believe that girls should go to school. They didn't see a connection to the work she would do as mother and wife. But María didn't buy into that belief. While she accepted it, she was determined to create a different reality for her own daughters.

And she made it so. María's daughter, Jovita, is one of 11 children she would ensure got an education. Today, Jovita is a mom, a wife, **AND** a professional and an AGENT OF CHANGE creating a better Guatemala.

María had a partner in making her dream for her daughters (and sons) come true—Common Hope.

Jovita Amalia Tay is a psychologist. She is a graduate of Universidad Mariano Gálvez de Guatemala. She is the Youth Leadership Program Coordinator at WINGS Guatemala. She the daughter of María and Gabino. She is a mother. She is a wife. And, she is one of María's dreams come true.

Jovita and all 10 of her siblings have graduated from high school. Common Hope was the bridge, the support system for María's and Gabino's commitment to education and dream of making it happen. **And, as a result, Jovita's daughters will never know poverty.** Common Hope, and María's and Gabino's commitment to education, has ended the cycle of poverty for the Tay Chocoj family.

Bottom line: Common Hope's education program works! Jovita Amalia Tay, Class of 2006, is just one example of *wherever there is education there is a way forward.*



Jovita's Common Hope school photo

COMMON HOPE'S OPPORTUNITIES IN EDUCATION*

1. Accounting Reinforcement
2. AniMate
3. Career Orientation
4. Computer Courses
5. Computer Labs
6. Computer Programming
7. Early Childhood Learning Center
8. Early Learning Circuits
9. Early Stimulation
10. English Club
11. Extracurriculars
12. Family Reading
13. Grade School Vacation Club
14. Group Reinforcement
15. Habilidades (Skills Building)
16. Habilidades Vacation Course
17. Homework Centers
18. Homework Check
19. Homework Help (General)
20. Homework Help (Reading & Math)
21. Homework Resources & Materials
22. Individual Attention
23. Internet Café Voucher Program
24. Junior High Vacation Math Club
25. Kids Group
26. Libraries
27. Math Club
28. Motivational Family Program
29. Music Classes
30. New Hope School (owned and operated by Common Hope)
31. Reading & Math Resilience
32. Reading Hour
33. Reading Promotion
34. Saturday Youth Workshops
35. Scholarship English Club
36. Scholarships (tuition and fees)
37. School Supplies
38. Seventh Grade Orientation
39. Special Cases
40. Sports & Recreation
41. Star Readers Club
42. Story Hour
43. Tutoring
44. Vocational Orientation
45. Vocational Orientation for Parents
46. Women's Leadership Group
47. Youth Development /Healthy Youth
48. Youth Group
49. Youth Leadership Group
50. Youth Talent Club

*Program delivery varies according to community need.



EDUCATION CORE

This is where it starts. Before anything, a child needs school supplies and the money to pay the fees required for attendance. Elementary (*primaria*) school is free. But junior high (*basicos*) and high school (*diversificado*) are not. From the beginning, Common Hope has eliminated this barrier to getting an education. Through years of learning, Common Hope determined that having schools supplies and scholarships is just one part of the equation. It starts here, where only one in five students graduate, and education support programs and resources can make all the difference. *Learn more about our education core programs on page 6.*



EDUCATION RESOURCES

In a country where libraries are uncommon, it can be difficult to develop a culture of reading. And, for families living in poverty, computers are rare and internet access is not affordable. Still the expectation is for students to submit typed papers and to reach reading and math standards. It's hard to imagine being in a situation where you don't know how you'll complete the assignment without resources. Common Hope's education program makes resources, like libraries, computer labs, and homework centers available to students to ensure that they have what they need to be successful. *Learn more about our education resources on page 8.*



EDUCATION SUPPORT

Sometimes it can seem like students are swimming upstream in a place where poverty means school can't be a priority. Making school and studying the "norm" can be the exception, rather than the rule. Common Hope students are fortunate to have support programs that make up for what the existing educational environment lacks and celebrate the choice to work toward graduation. Habilidades, AniMate and Vacation School are just a few of the many programs that Common Hope provides to students in order to support their educational journey. *See chart on facing page for all available programs and learn more about education support programs on page 9.*

core of the education program

Fighting poverty with diplomas. Common Hope's goals for its students are that they graduate from high school or vocational equivalent, that they develop critical thinking skills, and possess the confidence, compassion, and organizational skills that enable them to be agents of change in their communities. At the core of the education program are these basics.



SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Each year in January, at the start of the school year in Guatemala, Common Hope hosts *Back to School* events in the communities of Antigua, San Miguel Milpas Altas, San Rafael, and New Hope. Students and families work together with Common Hope's staff to set goals for the year and receive their school supplies, books, and uniforms.

This ensures every Common Hope student starts the year off excited and prepared, and eliminates the cost of supplies for parents and the pressure this puts on the family income. Without the needed supplies, their child would otherwise be unable to go to school.



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

On average, one in three first graders fail each year. Factors related to poverty prevent parents from providing their children with adequate stimulation. Consequently kids begin school with academic deficiencies.

Common Hope's Early Childhood Education Initiative is a multi-pronged approach to stimulate the brain and engage parents in their child's development from the beginning. Depending upon the community, Common Hope is delivering programs that influence early childhood opportunities. This delivery can include: Early Childhood Reading, Early Childhood Stimulation, Early Childhood Stimulation Center, and Preschool.



SCHOLARSHIPS (TUITION & FEES)

One of the barriers to education for families in Guatemala is the cost associated with going to school. Public school is "free" until 7th grade, however many schools still charge miscellaneous fees, which families cannot afford—and junior high and high school fees are significantly more. They can be \$600-\$1,200 per year. This is an enormous, prohibitive expense to the families Common Hope serves.

Common Hope removes this barrier for families through the *Becas* or Scholarship program. This program pays all tuition and fees for students.



NEW HOPE SCHOOL

It is Common Hope's goal to not replicate services delivered by other organizations, to be good stewards of our resources, and balance partnership and dependence, respect, and dignity.

For this reason, the delivery of education programs looks different in some communities. New Hope School is a one-of-a-kind educational program—an entire school system. The elementary school in New Hope is the only school Common Hope owns and operates. It was built to fulfill a specific need; families relocating to New Hope village after Hurricane Mitch in 1999 needed a place to send their children to receive an education and there was not a school in the area that they could attend.

The school serves nearly 300 students from pre-school (starting at three-years-old) through sixth grade. More than 200 students and their families continue to receive support after they graduate from New Hope School and go onto local junior and senior high schools. Support includes tutoring, after school homework help, youth group activities, and access to a computer lab and a library.

The school's curriculum encourages active, engaged learning and critical and creative thinking, often not the case in a typical public school. The school and its secondary programs foster a culture of exploration and learning that delivers long-term, sustainable change by equipping students and parents with the tools and resources they need and desire for success.

by the numbers

THE IMPACT OF EDUCATION

Nearly 4,000 students are served directly by Common Hope's education programs each year

537 New Hope students attended Preventative Workshops in 2019

Attendance at youth activities totaled more than **10,500** last year

155 students received their high school diploma in 2019

In total, more than 2,400 Common Hope students have graduated since 1996, the year of our first graduate

Graduates earn about 50% more than non-graduates

Female graduates earn three times more than non-graduates

educational resources

Opportunity and access change everything. Public schools in Guatemala face a severe lack of educational support resources. Libraries and computer labs in schools are extremely rare in Guatemala. These resources are critical to a student's potential and why Common Hope makes it a priority to create spaces and access to needed tools.

HOMEWORK CENTERS

Sometimes, a particular class or assignment can be especially difficult. Common Hope's homework centers give students a place to go to receive the help they need. We offer general homework help, support for reading and math, homework review, and also homework resources and materials like dictionaries, calculators, rulers, markers, paper, scissors, and more.

- 2,274 visits were made to Common Hope's homework centers in 2019
- 659 students participated in Math and English clubs last year
- A new homework center opened in San Miguel Milpas Altas in 2020!

LIBRARIES

More than just a place to check out books, libraries serve as a center for learning for students *and* for parents. They are a place to experience new ideas and connect to the outside world. Common Hope's libraries are hubs where families can go to participate in programs, read books together, and so much more.

- 7,325 books were checked out from CH libraries in 2019
- 8,438 visits were made to CH libraries by students and parents
- A part of the new homework center in San Miguel Milpas Altas is a small library.

COMPUTER LABS

Computer skills are critical to success in today's world. Computer labs create inclusive, structured learning environments where students can prepare for a tech-heavy future. Our computer labs give kids access to the internet in order to complete assignments, along with courses to increase their computer skills.

- There were 17,618 total visits to CH computer labs last year
- That's an average of 1,468 visits every month
- Thanks to a generous donation of computers from Perham Health through the efforts of Perham Rotary, the San Miguel homework center is equipped with a computer lab!



educational support

Every child learns at a different pace and in a different way. Common Hope's education support programs give students what they need to be successful in school and in life.

TUTORING

Common Hope offers specialized tutoring and individual help to students. Tutoring is particularly important in mathematics and English because these are subjects that many students struggle with. We even offer transportation to 7th grade students to come once a week for math tutoring.

YOUTH SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Common Hope's Youth Support Programs strive to give adolescents the tools and confidence they need to make positive decisions as they enter adulthood, while providing them with the academic support to be successful in school. Our youth support programs include academic support, social and emotional support, leadership training, sports and recreation activities, arts and crafts, music, and workshops on common social issues facing youth in Guatemala today. In many instances, the youth themselves help coordinate these programs for their peers.

HABILIDADES (SKILLS BUILDING PROGRAM)

The *Habilidades*, or Skills Building Program, seeks to help struggling first grade students develop and strengthen their learning skills so that they feel good about their ability to stay in school and succeed. Participants work on time management and organization so they can manage their day, neuro-motor skills development to improve mind/body coordination and improve problem-solving skills, and math and reading skills.

ANIMATE (ANIMACIÓN MATEMÁTICA) MATH RESOURCE CENTER

Math is a subject many students struggle with. In 2018, 88% of students who graduated from high school in Guatemala did not reach the expected standards in math. The AniMate Math Resource Center makes math more accessible, understandable, and fun for students and teachers alike. The center allows for a student to figure math out with the guidance of Common Hope's team, providing support beyond the "assigned" homework of the day, and reinforcing critical foundational math skills.



WITH A LITTLE HELP AND A LOT OF PERSEVERANCE

Since infancy, Marcos has struggled with a visual impairment which left him completely blind in his right eye. His impairment made school especially difficult, both inside the classroom and at home. Seeing the blackboard, completing work on time, and navigating the classroom were all daily challenges for Marcos. He also faced discrimination and bullying by classmates due to his disability.

Despite his best efforts, these factors caused Marcos to fail first grade. At this point in his educational journey, Common Hope stepped in. Marcos' social worker, Jazmin, connected his family to the *Habilidades*, or the Skills Building program, which provides struggling first graders with extra educational support outside of the classroom.

While he was repeating first grade, Marcos was also attending *Habilidades* sessions twice per week. The sessions focused on neuro-motor skills development, math and reading skills, and time management and organization.

"Marcos was one of the most outstanding students in *Habilidades*," says Felipe, Common Hope psychologist and *Habilidades* coordinator. "He wanted to succeed. Now his level of reading is excellent and his neuro-motor processes are outstanding. He has proven that with perseverance you can achieve anything," Felipe continued.

*With support from the *Habilidades* program, a referral for eye glasses from the Common Hope clinic, and unwavering optimism, Marcos passed first grade with flying colors. He is now in second grade and doing well in school.*



WHEREVER THERE IS EDUCATION there is a way forward

Common Hope's education programs are made possible because of a committed army of supporters. Thanks to YOU, thousands of students are receiving an education. Common Hope always need more help to reach more kids!



PARTNER

Becoming a Common Hope Partner with a **monthly gift of any amount** is one of the best ways to support Common Hope's mission.

Your unrestricted monthly gift provides a steady, predictable flow of financial support, ensuring that we can help students achieve the education they deserve and get the help they need along the way.

- \$7/month can give a student school supplies for the year
- \$25/month can help stock the pharmacy with medications



SPONSOR

Like Partners, Sponsors also provide much-needed recurring revenue that goes directly to supporting programs. More than 40% of Common Hope's funding comes from sponsorship. **But deeper than that, sponsors build a personal relationship with a student in Guatemala and their family supporting their goals and dreams.** Sponsors provide motivation and hope on a student's path to graduation.

- Join as a Lead Sponsor at \$65/month (sole sponsor)
- Join as a Guiding Sponsor at \$35/month (shared sponsor)



VOLUNTEER

Financial support isn't the only way to join Common Hope's mission to fight poverty with diplomas. Changing lives requires many people in many places doing what they can to make a difference.

From lending a hand in the U.S. office to helping deliver programs in Guatemala, Common Hope relies on volunteers to make it happen.

- Visit our website to explore volunteer opportunities in the U.S. office in St. Paul MN and at our site in Antigua, Guatemala



SUPPORTERS IN ACTION making education possible

PARTNERING WITH THE EARLY CHILDHOOD INITIATIVE AT NEW HOPE SCHOOL

The New Hope Early Childhood Initiative's main objective is to give students the tools and resources necessary so that 90% of students are promoted to the next grade and meet the national standards in math and reading according to the Guatemala National Curriculum.

Thanks to the generous support of a grant from Charities Aid Foundation of America on behalf of Target, together we are achieving outstanding results at New Hope School. One-hundred percent of first grade students were promoted to second grade last year!

Target Guatemala has supported the Early Childhood Initiative at New Hope School since 2008, not only through the grant from CAF but also through engaging activities with the students that promote health and sustainability like planting a garden of herbs and vegetables with the preschool students.



TARGET®

muchas gracias
Target Guatemala!



Common Hope's mission is to promote 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.

USE OF FUNDS



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.

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Covid-19 is creating unprecedented times for our families, communities, staff, and friends. There is no more important time to SHARE HOPE. Common Hope is committed to creating and delivering safe and innovative solutions to navigate these uncharted waters. Thank you for your ongoing thoughts. To learn more about what we are doing visit our website at www.commonhope.org

EVENT POSTPONED



NEW DATE, SAME LOCATION

OCTOBER 14, 2020

INTERCONTINENTAL SAINT PAUL RIVERFRONT

In order to keep our amazing supporters safe and healthy, Common Hope is postponing Noche de Colores. Please save the NEW DATE. We look forward to celebrating with you in October.

www.commonhope.org/noche