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# KGAP newsletter

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## DEAR KGAP SUPPORTERS

by *Connie Vanderhyden, KGAP Coordinator*

I am pleased to include several very interesting articles in this KGAP newsletter that help remind us all of the importance of our solidarity with the people of Guatemala. Recently I have had the opportunity to speak about Guatemala and KGAP to students at Youth Initiative High School (YIHS) in Viroqua and at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. It always seems important to me to explain the concept of solidarity in contrast, perhaps, to charity. Solidarity is about respectful, collaborative relationships and the recognition that all involved are committed to the struggle for human rights and dignity for everyone. A striking quote from an Australian aboriginal activist helps clarify the significance of solidarity: "If you have come to help us you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together." We may come from very different life circumstances but we strive for equality in our relationships and recognize that we all gain by the collaborative work we do together to advance the respect for human rights worldwide. Our Guatemalan friends always serve as shining examples of perseverance, patience, and commitment to change in the face of extreme odds.

KGAP continues to focus upon three areas in our work in Guatemala: education, healthcare and accompaniment. In this edition you will read an article by a former accompanier, Gillian Locasio, which will give you some insight into the continuing need for accompaniment in Guatemala in support of those struggling for human and environmental rights. You will also read an article by Juvenal Carrillo Funes, Chaculá middle school director and recent law school graduate. Because of the recent surge in unaccompanied children immigrating into the U.S., I asked Juvenal to comment on the issue and how it may relate to the lack of educational opportunities in Guatemala. In addition, Jeri Pearson has written an update on our KGAP scholarship recipients, a hopeful picture of many hard working young people from Chaculá.

This January we will be traveling to Guatemala to help celebrate the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the return to Chaculá. Area nurse midwife, Kim Dowat, will be offering continuing education for the midwives from Chaculá and the surrounding region. This workshop represents another excellent collaboration that KGAP is grateful to help facilitate. In March students from the Youth Initiative and other area high schools will visit Chaculá as part of their 3-week study/travel journey to Guatemala. Shawn Lavoie, YIHS instructor, will lead the group and I will join them as they make their way up to Chaculá. This will be the 8<sup>th</sup> youth trip to Guatemala since 2001. The students are committing to fundraising for one scholarship (\$700) by selling Guatemalan calendars. Please contact me if you are interested in purchasing a beautiful calendar to help support their efforts.

IMPORTANT: KGAP now has a website!! The address is [www.kgap.org](http://www.kgap.org). You are welcome to spread the word so that others who don't receive the newsletter can access it online. In addition, NISGUA, our national organization, has a fantastic and very informative website ([www.nisgua.org](http://www.nisgua.org)). Please check it out and continue to keep yourself up-to-date on what is happening in Guatemala and in our solidarity network.

As always, we thank you profoundly for your interest and support! KGAP is able to continue solidarity work because of all of you and we never forget this for one minute!! Every donation means more students will receive education, more health care will be provided for the village, and accompaniment can continue in Guatemala into the future.

In gratitude,  
Connie Vanderhyden

Please send tax-deductible  
donations to:

**KGAP**

c/o CONNIE VANDERHYDEN  
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VIROQUA, WI 54665



*House Concert in Chaculá  
photo by Andi Alexander © 2014*

## THE ON-GOING NEED FOR ACCOMPANIMENT

By Gillian Locascio, KGAP Accompanier

A conch shell blows, loud and clear in the night. 5 AM.

My accompaniment partner sits bolt upright, swinging wildly in the hammock as he struggles to button his shirt. "What happened? What's wrong? What's the emergency?"

"I don't think it's anything urgent," I say, rising from the wooden boards of my bed and tiptoeing across the cold cement floor to peer outside. A few flashlights shine quietly in the middle of the field where three shadowy figures stand silhouetted against the starry sky. I can hear their low voices and laughter. "I think it is just a regular meeting."

"At 5 AM!?" my partner asks, incredulous. I shrug. "They'll come get us if they need us; they know where we are."

He shakes his head and lays back in his hammock, pulling a blanket over him. Soon his light snoring fills the small room where we are staying. It is the waiting room of the tiny community health post that they transform into our quarters when we are in town.

I gather my sweater tightly around me and stay at the doorway, watching as the sky lightens and flashlights bounce along the paths from all sides, converging on the field. Soon a circle of men stand in front of a pink sky; one man still holding the conch shell, another with a pen and notebook. They are talking, writing down names – coordinating something.

"Welcome to the Ixcán," I think to myself, laughing at my partner's shock. In the last few months, I have had three different partners from the accompaniment project join me in the region. Each has been amazed (or, in this case, startled) by how the communities we visit are so well organized.

For the fifty-one Maya Q'eqchi communities that compose the Association of Communities for Development, Defense of Territory and Natural Resources (ACODET), the culture and livelihoods that have been tied to their land for generations are under threat.

The Guatemala government plans to build the second largest hydroelectric dam in the country on their territory, a project that would impact an estimated 32,000 people, flooding indigenous communities and destroying the surrounding environment.

Having learned important lessons from the communities affected by the Chixoy Dam (the first and largest dam in the country), the communities of ACODET have formed a deep and organized resistance to the imposition of the planned Xalalá Dam. Over 400 Maya Achí people were massacred by the Guatemalan Army so that the Chixoy Dam project could move forward and after more than thirty years, communities remain without electricity or access to government services.

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## EDUCATION AND EMIGRATION

By Juvenal Carrillo Funes

Middle School Director, Nueva Esperanza-Chaculá

**IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION:** Education is vital for all human beings; it is the necessary base for community social and economic development. Unfortunately our government doesn't think this way and continues to invest more in unnecessary military development, laying waste to the Guatemalan economy and leaving the inhabitants with great need for health care and education. The government doesn't create work opportunities either which makes it very hard for Guatemalans to live a dignified life. Therefore, some people make the decision to emigrate to the U.S. and Mexico to try to make a better life for their families. As many people know, our culture is very different from that of the U.S. and Mexico and consequently, some Guatemalan immigrants pick up bad habits such as alcoholism and drug addiction. Many do not return to Guatemala and some do return without anything to show for themselves, not having accomplished what they set out to do. In addition, many Guatemalans suffer from discrimination and exploitation in the labor force in these countries. Results of emigration include family disintegration and the acquisition of bad habits, as mentioned previously. The positive side is that some immigrants obtain good work while in the U.S. or Mexico and are able to send money back to their families, creating better living conditions and supporting the education of their children.

**CAUSES BEHIND THE SURGE OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN EMIGRATING TO THE U.S.:** From my point of view, the increase in the number of unaccompanied children emigrating to the U.S. in the past few years is due to extreme poverty and lack of opportunities in Guatemala. In my experience, the Chaculá youth who leave for the U.S. are those whose parents can't support their middle and high school education. The parents see no other option because they don't have work to generate an income to be able to give their children the dignified life they deserve. I can tell you about many other communities that are very remote where there are no educational institutions for the youth to continue their studies. These children never have the dream of continuing their education because they would have to travel two hours or more to arrive at a place where there is a middle school and therefore, many parents cannot to support their education. The majority of the youth that emigrate do so because their parents believe they will have better opportunities for intellectual and economic development in the U.S.

**BENEFITS OF THE KGAP HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIP PROJECT IN CHACULA:** The KGAP scholarship project began in 1996, 18 years ago, with my scholarship for a teacher education program in Huehuetenango. Thanks to Connie Vanderhyden and KGAP, several individuals from Wisconsin raised funds to help me continue my studies. Since that time, Connie and Jeri Pearson have promoted this effort for my community, Nueva Esperanza, Chaculá, Nentón, Huehuetenango. Because of their work the project has grown from 2 students per year, then 3 and now 23 students a year are receiving scholarships to continue their high school programs in various

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## EDUCATION AND EMIGRATION, FROM PAGE 2

municipalities of the department of Huehuetenango. Each scholarship is worth \$700 a year. We are very fortunate to have this project that has now benefited a group of approximately 75 students in the pursuit of a variety of career paths offered at this level in our country. Many have graduated and are working as teachers, bank tellers, agronomists, nurse auxiliaries, etc. In other words, this education fund has been very effective in the development of our community. Thanks to Connie, Jeri and all the wonderful donors that have united together for this dignified cause for our education. THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR VALUABLE SUPPORT!

KGAP SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AT THE CHACULA INSTITUTO BASICO (7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades): In our community there is an educational center at the middle school level where many young people who finish primary school have the opportunity to continue studying. This institute serves youth between the ages of 12 and 17 years old. Each year approximately 21 to 25 students finish 6<sup>th</sup> grade and about 18 are able to register for classes at the institute. The others have to give up their dreams of pursuing their education because of the lack of economic resources. As I mentioned at the beginning, our government does not support public education for everyone and schooling at this level comes with a cost, creating a major impediment for many students. This year in Chaculá the number of students who had the opportunity to attend the institute grew considerably due to a KGAP donation that covered the tuition for 63 students, the total number that attended grades 7 to 9. THANKS AGAIN TO ALL THE GENEROUS KGAP DONORS!



Enjoying the Chaculá Festival  
photo by Andi Alexander © 2014

## THE ONGOING NEED FOR ACCOMPANIMENT, FROM PAGE 2

Since 2007, local residents have voiced their overwhelming opposition to the project in two community referendums – 90% voted against the project in the municipalities of Ixcán and Uspantán. Nonetheless, when ex-military general Otto Pérez Molina assumed the presidency in 2012, he declared the Xalalá Dam to be of national interest, and his administration continues to push the project forward.

Most recently, while disregarding Guatemala's own transparency processes, INDE (the government's National Institute of Electrification) granted an "emergency" license to carry out the project's pre-construction feasibility studies to Brazilian company Intertechne Consultores S.A., effectively denying the affected communities their right to consultation as protected under both Guatemalan, and international, laws and conventions (i.e. ILO 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).

In other parts of the country, continued conflicts over land and natural resources have resulted in government repression, assassinations and the imprisonment of community leaders. This institutionalized violence is why ACODET has requested our presence: to watch, to listen, to report on what happens and, we hope, to ensure a certain level of political safety for their organizing.

As my partner and I walk to the home of one of the ACODET families to share breakfast—most likely handmade tortillas and freshly picked black beans with a hint of smoked chili, the staples that never fail to make my taste buds dance—my eyes rest on a sign posted above one of the community stores: "Why should we, the poorest in the country, have to pay with our lands and lives the cost of an unsustainable model of development that is bringing the planet closer to destruction?"

One of the organizers in the community catches my gaze and joins us on our walk. "Things are getting worse," he tells us matter-of-factly, tossing each of us an orange. "INDE (the government's National Institute of Electrification) is pressuring us from all sides. In 2007, when the government last tried to contract out the project, they said no one was living here. It was the reporting of other human rights companions like you, that helped us tell people internationally that we are here and that we are opposed to the dam." He paused. "You have to let people know what is happening here."

For us, as international human right companions, the Ixcán is both difficult and inspiring. We live out of our backpacks. The roads we walk are many and muddy. The creepy-crawlies are large and numerous. Transport is complicated and uncomfortable. But it is all worth the honor of standing with the leaders and community members who struggle in defense of life, territory, and justice. Our days sometimes involve going to meetings, sometimes putting on vests and observing public events, and sometimes visiting with families. There is always note taking and article writing, and writing letters back home. We listen to the voices of these organized communities and then with those powerful truths, we begin to mobilize in our own communities to take action – to build an international movement for self-determination, global justice, and solidarity. Another sign in town reads, "La vida es lucha y se lucha siempre." Translation, life is struggle, and we struggle always. Our solidarity does not end when we leave Guatemala. It is a commitment we carry within our hearts wherever we go.

*Gillian Locascio was a human rights companion with the Guatemala Accompaniment Project of the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) from 2012-2013. She helped to coordinate the 2014 NISGUA Fall Speaking Tour, "Rivers for Life: Cultural Resistance to the Xalalá Dam" where ACODET coordinator, Víctor Caal Tzuy visited the Pacific Northwest, the Bay Area, and Washington D.C. to raise awareness and support for their ongoing struggle for self determination and indigenous rights. For more ways to stand in solidarity with the community resistance to the Xalalá Dam and learn about the Guatemala Accompaniment Project, please visit [www.nisqua.org](http://www.nisqua.org); or email [organizer@nisqua.org](mailto:organizer@nisqua.org).*

## SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT NEWS

By *Jeri Pearson, former KGAP Accompanier*

Thanks to the generous donations of KGAP supporters, over twenty students from Chacula received scholarships this year to study at the high school level in different communities in Huehuetenango and Chiapas. Five of the students will have graduated this fall; ten students are set to graduate in 2015, and eight in 2016. We have received letters and grades from many of them. I have translated three of letters to share—from Alexis Garcia, a 2014 graduate, from Luis Gerardo, a 2015 graduate, and from Lissa Karina, who will graduate in 2016. They are all very grateful. Also, I have included a list of Alexis' classes this year in order to give the KGAP sponsors an idea of his workload!

The middle school principal, Juvenal Carrillo Funes, and the other teachers have proposed a new development in the scholarship project. They would like to establish a registered and legal education association authorized by the Guatemalan government in order to more effectively manage the scholarship program, improve the communication between the parents and students and the KGAP donors, and to appoint a person to provide more direct support for the students. They will be working on establishing this association in 2015. Thanks to the generous support of KGAP sponsors, the scholarship program continues to thrive in Chacula!

### *From Alexis Garcia:*

*Hello, my name is Alexis Garcia. I am a Guatemalan citizen and I live in Chacula. At the present time, because of my studies, I am living in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. In the first place I want to thank you all for the scholarship offered me, also I want to tell you a little about my life and the course of my studies. My family consists of four family members, my father, mother, little sister, and me. My father is a peasant farmer and my mother dedicates herself to care of our home. I am an optimistic young man and have group leadership skills. I stand out because I have achieved good grades, as you can see in my attached report card. I finished the medium level high school nursing program, thanks to the support of all of you; special thanks to Connie Vanderhyden and Jeri Pearson. I have studied for two years and it has been a great effort for me and for my parents, given our economic situation. I have had to prepare my food, wash my clothes, and spend time studying. Because I have to pay rent my educational costs are higher. Thanks to God today finally I have finished my high school studies. I have a dream that I would love to achieve – to enroll in the University and continue my studies in medicine, but it is difficult because of what I have mentioned earlier. I give you my heartfelt thanks, also to God, for having supported me during the two years of my high school studies in order to achieve one of my dreams and to have the*



*satisfaction that I have opened one of the first doors of the many that lie ahead! Thank you! God Bless You! Sincerely, Verlin Alexis García Díaz (2014 graduate of a college preparation nursing program in the Colegio Liceo Privado de Ciencias Comerciales in Huehuetenango) Alexis had 14 classes this year – Hispano-American Literature, Math, Social Studies, Biology, English V, Psychology, Philosophy, History of Guatemalan Art, Physical Education, Seminary on Economic Problems in Guatemala, Scientific and Humanistic Themes, Mother Care and Surgical Medicine, Supervised Practice, and Computers. And he achieved very good grades!*

### *From Luis Gerardo:*

*Hello to my respected friends Jeri and Connie, I hope that both of you are doing well and enjoying good health. I am writing this letter in order to express my extreme gratefulness for the support of the scholarship you have given me so I can continue my studies. Thank you so much. I really don't know how to thank you for this great support, because thanks to this help I am thriving, and thanks to God I achieved good grades. I hope that next year you will continue my scholarship, as my family is lacking in economic resources. If it weren't for the scholarship I would not be studying and truthfully I need you to continue to support me for I aim to improve myself and to be able to find work so I can support my family. My mother suffers from an illness and we don't have the means to buy her medicines and all that she needs, which of course means they aren't able to give me the support that my studies require. Right now I am studying high school in Santa Ana Huista, Huehuetenango. With much respect I say goodbye, hoping that you continue to help me. I wish you luck in the work you have, because many people are sincerely grateful for the support you have given us. With all my heart I thank you and say goodbye wishing you many blessings. May God bless you today and always. Sincerely, Luis Gerardo Torres Funes (2015 graduate studying the arts and science emphasis at the Instituto Nacional de Educación Diversificada in Santa Ana Huista)*

### *From Lissa Karina:*

*I hope you are in good health and that your families are well too. In Chacula all is well, the people are the same as always, only the weather is affecting us somewhat. But really we are well. I am very happy and thankful for the effort you all make each year for us students. It drives us to keep studying and we will show you that we appreciate it and will benefit from your support. It is a pleasure to send my greetings, Connie. I say goodbye now, hope that all will turn out well and that God blesses and protects you. I include with this letter a copy of my report card for the third semester. Lissa Karina Silvestre Díaz (2016 graduate studying Business Administration at the Colegio Privado Mixto Camposeco in Jacaltenango)*

*Alexis Garcia  
photo sent by Alexis*

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## MANY THANKS TO OUR RECENT DONORS!


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*Connie Vanderhyden and Jeri Pearson in front of the old accompanier's house  
photo by Andi Alexander © 2014*



Check out our new website!



Read the newsletter and see more photos of Chaculá at:

[www.kgap.org](http://www.kgap.org)

**KICKAPOO/GUATEMALA ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT (KGAP)**

KGAP is a project of the Kickapoo Cultural Exchange, Gays Mills, WI, a 501c3 nonprofit organization registered in the state of Wisconsin and Minnesota. Contributions are tax deductible. In addition, KGAP is affiliated with the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) a national non-profit organization that supports many projects and efforts in Guatemala.

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