

# KGAP newsletter

## REMEMBERING, REVISITING, RENEWING RELATIONSHIPS

by Connie Vanderhyden, KGAP Coordinator

This spring I was asked to give two presentations about KGAP and our continuing relationship with Nueva Esperanza-Chaculá. I spent time organizing and updating my slides, information, and personal reflections. The first presentation was for another Wisconsin solidarity organization, Farmer to Farmer, and the second was for a Women and Globalization course at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. Each presentation had a different focus and allowed me to think about many aspects of our work in Guatemala over the years.

In preparation for the presentations I asked a few friends from Chaculá to send me their ideas and reflections on several topics: How things have changed for women in Guatemala, and particularly in Chaculá; how healthcare has evolved over the 20 years since returning to Guatemala; and a general history of the community from refugee camps to the present day. In this edition of the KGAP newsletter I am including two of the responses I received. One is a letter from Miriam Carrillo, a young woman I have known for almost 20 years who is now the pre-school teacher in Chaculá. The other is from Natalio Funes Figueroa, also a friend of many years, who wrote about healthcare in the community. In the next newsletter I will include some of the general history that Jacobo Diaz Coto sent as well.



Scholarship recipient Miriam Carrillo  
with her grandmother, mother and son-four generations!  
photo by Andi Alexander

## WOMEN IN GUATEMALA

By Miriam Carrillo, Chacula Community Member

translated by Connie Vanderhyden

In Guatemala many years ago, women were not considered to have value in the society; they were like objects without rights. Parents decided the marriageable age and with whom they would marry. Therefore, they would often get married between the age of 12 and 13 and in many cases would have too many children (a minimum of 7). Regarding education, parents in rural areas believed that women weren't made to study, that

only men could do so. Women were only made to have children, take care of them and work in the home. Discrimination against women was excessive, although parents did not do this intentionally - it was because of traditions and customs.

In reality, women have occupied the most important role in society. Little by little one can see the changes that

are happening. Beginning in the rural communities, women are being considered for jobs that only men could have done before. Now there are women that are group leaders. For example, in Chaculá there are women members and leaders of the Board of Directors, neighborhood representatives, mayors of the community, and other roles.

Currently, many parents have left behind the ideology that only men can study and that is why many women have studied different careers with parental support.

## CHACULA STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS PLEASED WITH MORE KGAP SCHOLARSHIPS

*By Jeri Pearson*



*The Gaspar Paiz family with Jeri Pearson and her namesake, Maria Jerina,  
photo by Andi Alexander*

Over the last 17 years KGAP has sponsored scholarships for Nueva Esperanza-Chaculá students to study a high school career. As of 2013, a total of fifty-three students have received scholarships and since 2004 KGAP has been able to sponsor ten students at a time (\$700 per student per year for three years— this covers about half their total costs per year.) Due to generous donations to the scholarship fund, starting in 2014 KGAP can now sponsor more than double that number of students each year! This brings the total to 71 scholarship students since 1997. The students, their parents, and teachers in Chaculá were VERY pleased to hear this exciting news when Connie and I were there in January. The teachers, most of the scholarship students, and some of their parents presented us with a wonderful program on January 13, the day after the 20<sup>th</sup> annual celebration of the community's return to Guatemala. The teachers went all out cooking and serving us a delicious lunch after the program.

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*REMEMBERING, continued from page 1*

Jeri Pearson, former KGAP accompanier and dear friend, has written an article about our recent visit to Chaculá in January and the wonderful reception the teachers, parents, and students prepared for our group. It is very apparent that the entire community is thrilled that so many more students are now able to first finish their Básico education in the village and then continue on to gain a high school education due to the generosity of KGAP donors and our increased education fund.

This year our delegation included many old friends, people who have been involved with the Guatemala Accompaniment Project and Chaculá over the years. We were treated to many meals of tamales, a special musical concert the night of our arrival, excursions to nearby special sites, fried chicken and French fries at the Feria, and dancing to the traditional sones (marimba music) on the final day of the fiesta. We have included some special photos from our visit, taken by photographer and my sister-in-law, Andi Alexander. The weather was wonderful, the festivities were delightful, and the village was peaceful. I am so grateful that we have this welcoming community to visit each year and feel honored we can collaborate with them in their struggle to attain greater respect and social justice. Our continuing work with NISGUA to provide accompaniment in Guatemala also continues to be extremely important. Almost daily I receive urgent actions from NISGUA regarding abuse, disappearances, and even deaths of Guatemalans struggling to have their voices heard about environmental justice and human rights. Please check their website ([www.nisgua.org](http://www.nisgua.org)) for updates and actions. Chaculá is fortunate to be organized as a cooperative and to have control of its own land but vigilance will continue to be necessary and our role as accompaniers and solidarios lends moral and physical support. Friends in Chaculá always comment that our continuing presence, collaboration and friendship make them know that they are not alone. This is good work, worthwhile and important. We could not continue without your interest and support.

THANK YOU  
TO ALL OF OUR DONORS FOR YOUR  
CONTINUING GENEROSITY!!

*KGAP SCHOLARSHIPS, continued from page 2*

Since there is no high school in Chaculá, only a primary and junior high school, the current 23 scholarship students have traveled to other towns to receive their high school education, including in Huehuetenango, Jacaltenango, Santa Ana, Nentón, San Antonio Huista, Chiapas, and Concepcion Huista. Ten of the students are girls and thirteen are boys. Five students are studying teaching careers, seven students are studying business administration, two students are studying accounting, and nine students are enrolled in two-year college preparatory programs, five of them with a nursing emphasis.

We expect to be hearing via email or regular post from all of the students this year, since they and their parents signed contracts stating that communication with the scholarship donors is required. We look forward to following the dreams and successes of these young people as they improve their lives and the lives of the people in their community and country. We also hope that by being able to offer more scholarships, every family in Chaculá will benefit. Please consider donating to KGAP's education fund!! Besides helping high school students receive an education, your donations help all the Básico (junior high) students pay tuition costs, provide improvements to the schoolyard and purchase computers for the school in



*Performers and speakers at the Scholarship Program on January 13, photo by Andi Alexander*

*WOMEN IN CHACULA, continued from page 1*

There are still cases where, for economic reasons, parents are not able to support their daughters' education. In spite of the difficulties, the desire to study doesn't die because there are many enthusiastic women now in Chaculá and in other parts of the country. There are women teachers, nurses, doctors, secretaries, accountants, and others. Because of these changes many women have contributed to the advancement of their families. We not only have professional women but also businesswomen, enterprising women who have struggled a lot so that they could be treated better in the society.

However, there are women who work double shift and many who continue to work very hard in the fields, doing heavy work in order to make a living for themselves and their families because many live alone. Sadly, the situation for these women continues to be heartbreaking, as in past times.



*Women of Chacula, photo by Andi Alexander*



## HEALTHCARE IN CHACULÁ

### Life, development, and health of individuals and villages – before and after

*written by Natalio Vicente Montejo/translated and adapted by Connie Vanderhyden*

History tells us that our people used to cure themselves with medicinal plants prescribed by community healers and midwives. Foreign diseases were unknown and therefore communities were able to resolve health problems themselves, such as births, broken bones, etc.



*Chacula in Moonlight, photo by Andi Alexander*

After many years the Catholic Church initiated a program to train and place community health promoters in each village. These individuals were in charge of preventive health education and also treated common illnesses in the communities. This took place before the internal armed conflict between the guerrillas and the Guatemalan government in the 1980s. At that time, due to all the violence and repression, many people fled and refugee camps were constructed on the Mexican side of the border where many men, women, and children lived for 12 long years.

Many concerns arose during all the years in refugee camps in Mexico. To address these

concerns, a multitude of organizations was created by the refugees with the assistance and accompaniment of non-governmental and international groups. These organizations gave priority to two important areas: health and education. The Catholic Church focused on education, recruiting volunteer education promoters and providing training in different areas so they could take charge of the children's education in the refugee camps. Later COMAR, the Mexican governmental organization supporting Guatemalan refugees, took charge of and strengthened the education project.

The Catholic Church also sponsored many other workshops and activities for the refugee population including crafts, farm steading, and vegetable gardening. The church strengthened the catholic faith by placing catechists in all the camps and municipalities where the refugees lived.

Without a doubt, education and healthcare go hand in hand in the development of individual and community well-being and soon a network of community health promoters and midwives emerged in the refugee camps with the accompaniment and support of various non-governmental organizations. Of these groups, PROSECO stood out, coordinated and directed by Doctor Luis Aquino who dedicated great enthusiasm and care to training health promoters and midwives. Dr. Aquino established a very close relationship with the General Hospital in Comitán, Chiapas, in order to attend to the healthcare needs of the Guatemalan refugees who were spread out over the 3 municipalities of Comalapa, La Trinitaria, and Margaritas.

Because of this great network of trained health promoters, an initiative emerged to form an association, APROCOSGUA, with the purpose of taking charge of the primary healthcare needs in the communities upon returning to Guatemala.

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*HEALTHCARE IN CHACULA, continued from page 4*

The hope was that the Guatemalan government would recognize and support the association's intention to provide rural healthcare, taking into account the preparation and training acquired in refuge.

However, upon returning to our country, we realized that the health network administered by the Guatemalan government was very weak and there wasn't an efficient state health policy.

Most of the health promoters that returned from Mexico were unable to continue their work upon returning because there was no support of any kind from the state of Guatemala or non-governmental organizations. APROCOSGUA became inactive as well and healthcare in many returned communities was very uncertain.

These days healthcare in our country is still problematic and there is very little chance that the Ministry of Health will take responsibility to make improvements due to socio-political governmental flaws. Therefore, many non-governmental organizations work to promote healthcare in the different Guatemalan communities, respecting their original cultural ancestry.

With the return to Nueva Esperanza- Chaculá, the Community Clinic was born, recognizing the basic health necessities of this community and of the northern Nentón zone. With the help of CEIBA, a non-governmental organization, the clinic was constructed during the first years of resettlement. It was equipped with basic supplies and administered by volunteer community health promoters with the support of doctors from other non-governmental solidarity organizations. In particular, two Spanish doctors, Dr. Joaquín Acevedo and Dra. Ester Bernaldo de Quirós, working through CEIBA, accompanied Nueva Esperanza-Chaculá for many years.

After several years, out of necessity and the lack of resources, most health promoters stopped working at the clinic. Only two of them remained, employed by CEIBA in the surrounding area and volunteering their free time at the Chaculá clinic. From then on, José Díaz and José Ros have played an important role in maintaining the work of the clinic. To this day the clinic continues to serve Chaculá and surrounding communities.

Many members of the community have concerned themselves about healthcare issues over the years. They knew that one day CEIBA would move on to other communities and looked ahead to form their own association to take up the administrative work of the clinic. APROSUVI was created and legalized in 2003 and an invitation went out to members of the community to join. Since that time, APROSUVI has worked to administer the Community Clinic of Nueva Esperanza- Chaculá where people from the community and from the nearby municipalities of Nentón and San Mateo Ixtatán receive a variety of healthcare services.



*The View from Barrio 6, photo by Andi Alexander*

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*HEALTHCARE IN CHACULA, continued from page 5*

APROSUVI has its headquarters in Chaculá but also provides services to clinics in Yalambajoch and Bulej. The association also coordinates different activities for health promoters and midwives from the municipalities of Nentón, Barillas, San Mateo Ixtatán and the Mam area in the department of Huehuetenango.

We also participate in health networks at the state level in OSAR and PLANNED PARENTHOOD to address all the current healthcare issues in the country. Many changes have occurred in women's lives because of family planning educational workshops and birth control methods provided by the Chaculá Health Clinic. Twenty years ago there was an average of 45 births a year and in 2013 there were 28 births, almost all of which were from recently married couples. The average number of children per family has also changed a great deal from the previous numbers of 4-9 to 1-3 in 2013.

These changes have resulted in improvements in women's lives because with fewer children they have more time for themselves, their children and their husbands. This improves the families as well as the community.



*Chucho's Dominion, photo by Andi Alexander*

Another contributing factor to fewer children is the migration of many men to the United States for work. Because of this emigration of husbands and sons, families have benefitted economically and this has also improved the quality of life for women. From our community there is an average of 85 people working in the U.S. and about 20 people working in Mexico. There are others that do seasonal work in Mexico during part of the year.

In the community, one can see the improvements in home construction and in the investment into the education of the youth. Right now many young people study secondary education and then proceed on to other schools to gain a high school degree and a career. Chaculá is one of the communities in the area that invests more money into education than others and, as a consequence, has more graduates in a variety of career paths. All of this is possible due to two things: one is the solidarity assistance from Connie's group and the other is the effort made by the migrants who send back funding for the education of their children.

*Colonia Nueva Esperanza Chaculá, March 2014*  
*Information source: Clínica Comunitaria Chaculá - APROSUVI*



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*Morning Coffee with Solidarity Friends in Chacula  
photo by Andi Alexander*

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.



*Scholarship Recipients with their teachers and with KGAP visitors Connie, Jeri and Martha  
photo by Andi Alexander*

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