

KGAP newsletter

GREETINGS TO ALL KGAP SUPPORTERS!

from Connie Vanderhyden, KGAP Coordinator

I hope this newsletter finds you enjoying a beautiful summer alongside your family and friends!

I had the distinct privilege of making two trips to Chaculá in the past 6 months. In January I made my annual visit, accompanied by several friends from Chicago, my son Will Vanderhyden, Will's girlfriend Luisa Rivera, and "la doctora" Kim Dowat, nurse-midwife extraordinaire! Kim and Luisa coordinated a two day workshop for midwives from Chaculá

and the surrounding villages, something the midwives have grown to hope for and expect annually (or biannually). The women truly enjoy gathering together to review techniques, share stories, laugh, and support one another in the extremely difficult and important role they play in their communities. The community health organization, APROSUVI, that serves Chaculá and other surrounding villages, sent us a proposal this year seeking funding that will support the midwives in the identification of high-risk pregnancies, education for the prospective parents, and emergency transportation to hospitals when necessary. You will be able to read about the grant KGAP received from the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Organization of Madison, WI, to help cover the costs of this proposal. We are grateful to be able to help support the efforts of the area midwives and APROSUVI in their struggle to improve maternal and neonatal care.

In March I traveled to Guatemala to join a group of students from Viroqua, WI, who were on a 3 week journey, very similar to the other student trips that we have been able to help coordinate every other year since 2001. When the trips began, I was teaching Spanish at Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School and the Youth Initiative High School and was able to be the main teacher/coordinator for the journey. Several other community members have co-coordinated these trips over the years: Marty Clearfield, Julee and Ben Agar, Lars Bergan, Shawn Lavoie, Emily Colacino, Moira Koons, and Mary Beth Flurry. I feel very grateful that we continue to be able to offer this experience to Youth Initiative, Laurel, Viroqua, and Westby High School students.



Chaculá resident Maxima Funes with KGAP Coordinator Connie Vanderhyden, during the annual January visit.

I was very impressed and inspired by the way our Viroqua youth adapted to and participated in the life of the village of Chaculá during our week's visit. I had asked the director and teachers of the Básico Institute to see if there were families interested in hosting our students for home stays during our visit and the response was "Yes"! The Viroqua youth were divided into pairs and stayed with families, immersing themselves in the lives of their hosts.

Every day we gathered for planned activities, arranged by the teachers and students in the village. We had such fun hiking, swimming, adventuring, singing, playing sports and games, and organizing school activities as well. The Chaculá youth were obviously thrilled to host our group and many friendships were established. As we were getting ready to leave, Juvenal Funes, the Director of the Básico Institute and a dear KGAP friend, told us in all sincerity that our students were extraordinary. In his view, not many North American or other Guatemalan students would be interested in coming to experience and get to know the people and humble conditions of Chaculá. I was very proud of our young people and also extremely grateful to Shawn Lavoie and Moira Koons for the leadership and direction they provided to prepare the students for this experience.

Of course, Chaculá is an exceptional place and we are all very grateful for their amazing hospitality. I told the students that in Chaculá we are not tourists or even students. Our relationship is long and deep and everyone who has the opportunity to visit Chaculá can feel that the community definitely considers us great friends and SOLIDARIOS!

In this newsletter you will read some reflections from Shawn Lavoie, leader of the student group who went to Chaculá in March and from some of the high school students who were on the trip. In addition there are two translated letters from Chaculá students and the administrator of the Básico Institute about our visit to their village.

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Letters from Colonia Nueva Esperanza Chaculá, Nentón Huehuetenango, Guatemala, May 7, 2015



Hello Connie,

We hope that you, your family, and your friends are very well. It was a great pleasure for us to spend time with you and the students throughout all the activities planned during your visit, beginning with the cultural night where we were able to share the traditions that we have in Chacula and Guatemala. We were so happy that everyone participated in all the activities.

When we went to the Hoyo Cimarron we really had fun on the hike and it was great to see how surprised everyone was because of the depth of the Hoyo Cimarron and the beautiful forest at the bottom. Many took pictures and hiked around the Hoyo. We all shared the snacks we brought and visited for a while before returning. It was so fun for us because you all brought such happiness to our lives! When we went to the waterfall we had to hike a lot but it was worth it because everyone loved it and didn't want to leave. We waded in the streams, bathed in the pools, and played together, taking pictures that will be our souvenirs of the journey. We were all so happy as we walked back to Chacula.

One afternoon we had a sports event together. We divided into teams and began to play. We have many nice memories from that activity. Later we were all invited to a special evening event. Everyone was there so we played games, told jokes, grilled hotdogs and ate sweets. We had an incredible night.

The unexpected day arrived when you had to return to where you live. We accompanied all the students who stayed in our homes and took many pictures. Many were crying because you had to go. It was wonderful for us to get to know all of you. We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts for all the support you have given to us and hope that you all come back soon.

Good luck to all the students and thank you, Connie, for making this friendship exchange possible.

Best regards,
Erica, Gaiskane y Alan.

Hello Connie!

I hope that you and your loved ones are well and that you are finding success and blessings in everything that you do.

It is a pleasure to write to you to let you know that your last visit to Chacula was so enjoyable and, without a doubt, a sweet experience for everyone concerned – teachers, administrators, and students from Chacula. We liked being together with your student group so much and felt that the different activities we were able to share strengthened our interpersonal relationships. Visiting the tourist areas of our region and taking part in other activities helped us learn more about each other. Despite language and cultural differences, with the will and desire it is possible to make things happen. It is an enormous satisfaction to have people like you visit us and, in spite of the distance, we hope there will be many more such visits. It will be a pleasure and will bring our community great happiness!

I would also like to express my gratitude for the support that you and all the others give to make it possible for Chacula to change for the better day by day. The dreams of many secondary and high school students from different municipalities of Huehuetenango are becoming reality, something that previously seemed impossible due to the conditions in which we were living.

With fondness and appreciation,
Carlos Omar Gutiérrez López.
Administrator – Chaculá Básico Institute



*Baile Tipico, or Traditional Dance,
performed by Chaculá students*

Community High School

by Mario Rolando Montejo López, Director

Establishing a coed high school has been a dream that the community of Chaculá has been promoting for many years. In 1995 the Básico Institute began to function, supported by the community cooperative. Many students have graduated from this level of education and have gone on to study high school in other municipalities. However, some don't have the opportunity to continue studying. This is why the need to establish a high school in the community has become urgent. In the past, several community leaders made efforts but due to the bureaucratic process and the lack of qualified personnel, the dream had not yet germinated.

In 2013 the Chaculá Cooperative Board of Directors had conversations with several institutions that manage educational projects in rural areas of the country. After this, many community groups came together to discuss the possibility of starting a high school in the community. They took the idea to a general assembly of the community membership and there was unanimous agreement on the importance of starting a school that could provide secondary education for the community and the wider Chuj region in the municipality of Nentón. This would provide a source of work for teachers who had begun their university training and offer a service to the community. It was determined that the Chaculá Community Development Council (COCODE) would be responsible for the necessary paperwork, counting on the advice and support of several community teachers. From then on, Mario Rolando Montejo López called together the teachers that had completed their university education to help with the documentation required by the Ministry of Education for the creation of a private educational center.

After the paperwork was completed, the various community groups met again to decide upon a name for the high school. Three names were proposed: Otto René Castillo, Miguel Angel Asturias and Connie Vanderhyden. A democratic vote was taken and all participants voted for Connie, to honor her and her organization, KGAP, that has supported scholarships for more than 20 years so that the children in the community can continue their studies. It was also decided that the school would include the name of the community. The official name is: Colegio Mixto Chaculense Connie Vanderhyden, established January 21, 2014. The two career paths that are currently offered are College Preparation in Letters and Science and Intercultural/Bilingual Pre-school Teacher Education.

From Connie: The Chaculá High School opened in January, 2015 with 6 students. It is the hope that many more students from the area will choose to attend this school in the years ahead. It is a private institution and requires a tuition payment but students from Chaculá will certainly save on housing, food, and transportation. It is a great honor to have a school that carries my name but I know that I represent all KGAP supporters in this role! Thanks again, for your confidence and generosity!

Greetings, continued from page 1

KGAP has been sponsoring scholarships for students attending the Básico Institute (7th-9th grade) and also scholarships for students to obtain a high school education outside the community because that option hasn't existed in the village. Students going to high school choose between a technical education (e.g. mechanic, accountant, nurse's assistant) and college preparatory studies. This year a new high school program has been established in Chaculá, offering a college preparatory course. It is exciting to see this development and you can read a translated summary in this newsletter (right here on this page) of an article from the director of the new initiative, Mario Rolando Montejo Lopez.

Guatemala has been in the news lately due to revelations about corruption at the upper levels of government and the huge protests that has inspired. I invite you to visit our website at www.kgap.org and click on the links to read more about current events in the country. For more information, visit the website and blog of our national organization at www.nisgua.org.

As always, I want to express my deep gratitude for your continuing interest in KGAP and the struggle for justice in Guatemala. With your support, we are helping facilitate the education of young people from Chaculá and the surrounding region. This is what we can do to help create the space and the conditions in which our Guatemalan friends can continue their struggle for dignity, peace, and justice in their own country. THANK YOU!

As always, your tax-deductible donations are much appreciated. They can be sent to:

KGAP
c/o Connie Vanderhyden
E9048 Pierce Hill Road
Viroqua, WI 54664



Connie Vanderhyden with a poster explaining the official name of the new Chaculá high school.

At Home in Chaculá

By Shawn Michael Lavoie

At the end of high school most students are looking out into the world and wondering where their place is. Home has been defined for them their whole life. Now they are beginning to define “home” for themselves. This bi-annual, three-week trip to Guatemala that KGAP has been sponsoring for 14 years brings Juniors and Seniors from Viroqua the farthest away from home and comfort they’ve ever been. Yet, as challenging and foreign as it is, the trip gives them a new sense of their place in the world, a new sense of home.

This year’s group had 12 students and two chaperones, myself and Moira Koons, who had been on the trip as a student in 2007. The 12 students were: Justys Grenier, Micah Nordgren, Hannah Eddy, Lydia Turino, Raina Gravatt, Althea Summer Sky, Corin Humphrey, Will Sherwin, Charlie Townsley, Arlo Townsley, Aidan Farrell, and Colin McIntire. We spent a week doing service-learning at the San Lucas Mission on Lake Atitlan, a week of intensive language learning at The Mountain School outside of Xela, and our final week in Chaculá where we stayed in families’ homes. When we arrived in Chaculá, we had a lot of traveling already under our belts. But our experience in Chaculá took us to the next level. We went from “volunteering” at the Mission and “learning” at the Mountain School to “living” in Chaculá.

The first few days, though, were rough. Houses in Chaculá are not like the houses we’re used to. Bathrooms and showers were obvious points of difference and discomfort. Not to mention, many of the families made room for us to stay by cramming into one bedroom so that we could have a bed. And, of course, there was the persistent language barrier which made meal times awkwardly silent. At first, I really wasn’t sure that students were ever going

to feel “at home.”

What overcame the multiple-layers of discomfort was the spirit of generosity and the overwhelming welcome that the families, especially the Basico students who were host sisters and brothers, gave to us. We were treated as family. Kids wanted us to play. The Basico students took us on hikes, taught us new card games, and invited us into their life. Families cared for us and fed us. They shared with us their stories and wanted to know ours. We laughed together. We even cried together.

People are generous everywhere you go, but I know that our welcome in Chaculá was special. It comes from 21 years of accompaniment and genuine friendship. It comes from the continued presence of Connie and KGAP, which has planted the seed of solidarity between our communities. It comes from a mutual respect for human dignity.

So, over three thousand miles from Southwest Wisconsin, our group found a new home and a new community. One reason I lead this trip (now for the fourth time) is that it’s the best way I’ve found to expand students’ perspective on the world, to break out of the U.S. bubble and to truly empathize with the daily struggles of the majority of people in the world. Students learn that they are intimately connected to people and places far from their own place of origin, that their well-being is linked to the well-being of others, that their place in the world is defined by their capacity to build relationships and limited only by their ability to understand and to love. ¡Te quiero Chaculá! Thank you for making your home our home. I hope one day to live in a world where I can host you in my home with as much hospitality as you’ve hosted me.



Shawn Lavoie, high school group leader, with friends from Chaculá

Reflections from our Guatemalan Journey

Aiden Farrell

"My mom warned me awhile back that the majority of the world lives with much less. I heeded her words to some degree, but I'm a teenager. I heard her, but I didn't pay much attention. While in Guatemala, I could hear my mom's voice ringing with clarity as we drove through small villages that seemed to breathe poverty. Observing the resilience of impoverished people, I cemented in my mind the unimportance of material wealth. Of course in a system that revolves around capital, there are certain uses for money which can make one comfortable. Yet despite all the dust, grime, and lack of space (in Guatemala), I could see that people lived on in their own way, and were generally happy."

Justys Grenier

"The whole week (in Chaculá) we were just guests in a home but the whole town was our home! The whole week felt like a dream as we got to experience such beautiful places, such wonderful people and a feeling of comfort, safety and open hearts. Our eyes were opened to the tragic times that the people of Guatemala had experienced in so many different ways. One of the days in Chaculá we went to a ruin that lay on the site of a town that was massacred and burnt to the ground by the military during the Guatemala civil war. On another day the students brought us to a waterfall and for me personally that was the day that all the walls were broken down and we all got to a new level of friendship with students of Chaculá. When we left there were tears being shed from both sides, but they were tears of joy because of the beautiful connection that had just been made...This trip gave me a perspective on how I should, on how I can, and how I will live my life. I knew to expect poverty when I went to Guatemala, but I was shocked at the intensity, so I guess I now can understand what a third world country really means. Another thing that was hard to see was how hard people worked and how little they were rewarded for those efforts. Overall I will treasure this experience that I had the amazing opportunity to be a part of and I hope to have many more like it in my life."



Justys Grenier, Youth Initiative High School student



*Althea Sky & Corin Humphrey,
Youth Initiative High School students*

Charlie Townsley

"It has been a very powerful experience to not only learn about but to see how directly United States policy affects the lives of people in other countries. Even today in Guatemala US initiatives on immigration and the War on Drugs are dramatically influencing the daily lives of Guatemalans. This made me very aware of the responsibility that I have as a voting member of the United States to ensure that I do whatever I can to safeguard the well-being of people in other countries as well as my own. Contrary to what I expected, going to Guatemala taught me equally as much about my own country as it did about the country I had set to explore.

Just as visions of beautifully jagged mountains, driving through clouds, smoking volcanoes, and incredible sunsets are forever seared into my mind, the beauty, resilience, strength, and incredible kindness of the Guatemalan people are locked within my heart. Guatemala is a very special place. I hope one day to be able to give back just as much as I have taken away. I hope that one day, all people will be able to share in this experience. Adios, Guatemala, ¡Un día voy a regresar!"

Arlo Townsley:

"We became close with the Basico students throughout the week; they took us to a waterfall, we all went to a bonfire together, we played cards together, we had a pentathlon-like event with everyone, we taught them in some classes that we were able to

Reflections, continues on page 6

Reflections, continues from page 5

construct. We laughed, cried, and lived together for a week and that created a unique feeling that had not been experienced elsewhere on the trip. The overall community (in Chaculá) was very welcoming and felt very nice. The town was unique from every other place we had been in Guatemala. It's location in the mountains yielded stunning views that reminded me a lot of Colorado thus making me feel closer to the US. And then there were the stories. While there, we heard a couple of different "life stories" of people, including Natalio who was a guerrilla fighter in the civil war and Angel Diaz who told us about the return to Guatemala. These were just a couple examples of stories we heard. In reality, there were much more. With each story the town seemed to unfold a little more and it became that much more alive to me."

Will Sherwin

Everything is new
we can talk without talking
though I want to talk

Raina Gravatt

"Probably one of the most important things I learned in Guatemala was just how connected the human race is, and how important that is. These people don't speak our language, they don't know our families, they don't know our country or much at all about me or my life. In some manner of speaking, they have absolutely no connection to us whatsoever. But that's not true. Every person in the world is connected, no matter what race, borders between countries, beliefs, or culture. I genuinely feel like I was part of the

family I stayed with (in Chaculá), or at least would soon enough be. And this was so important to me because it made me realize just how connected and loving the entire world has the potential to be. It's exactly what we need to allow the world to heal into the magnificent, wonderful place it could be. As human beings, we can unite, rather than separate, and live in peace and harmony. I know this is possible. This is the most important thing that is growing in my heart since the trip to Guatemala."

Lydia Turino

"Chaculá is charming, beautiful, homey, and pleasant. It is a small village and we stayed there for a week. My family was the two parents and then three kids, a fourteen-year old girl and a thirteen-year old girl and an eight-year old boy. They were all happy children that cried when we said good-bye. The mother, Catalina, had a booming laugh and a wide smile and she made me a hand woven bracelet that smells of wood smoke and memories. Did you know that memories have a smell?"

Hannah Eddy

"I am so proud of the people there, how hard they work. We work in different ways in the US but their determination is outstanding, in spite of how much many people have been through. Their slapstick humor, good attitude and love prevail. That love that I received there has stayed with me. I will carry it on to my attitude about immigration and undocumented workers. I want to hear more stories, stand up for workers rights and human rights, and offer an empathic understanding and solidarity for people leaving families and homes to try to navigate this crazy American country. Hate and bigotry surround them—fear and maybe even abuse. Respect for them is a real need that I have and can try to spread."



RPCV Organization Grants KGAP \$1200

The Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Madison, WI, have responded positively to KGAP grant proposals many times over the past 10 years. This year we made the following proposal and were notified on April 24, 2015, that our project would be fully funded:

The Kickapoo/Guatemala Accompaniment Project (KGAP) has had a sister relationship with the Guatemalan returned refugee village of Nueva Esperanza-Chaculá since its return and reconstruction in 1994. We are affiliated with the national organization NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala). We provided a human rights presence in the village of N.E.-Chaculá for 10 years, until the community felt more settled and secure. Over time we have also responded to requests for economic assistance in the areas of health and education. This year the Community Health Organization (APROSUVI) in the village has requested funding for a project to diminish the level of maternal and infant mortality in 7 communities located in two municipalities in the department of Huehuetenango. APROSUVI works consistently with the midwives from each village already but this proposal would increase efficiency and success with emergency cases that need to be taken to the hospital in Huehuetenango – sometimes 6 hours away.

The project would involve the following:

- *Working with the midwives on early identification of potential at-risk pregnancy cases.
- *Sensitive education to prepare mothers for potential transport to the hospital.
- *Maintenance and upkeep of community vehicle that is used as the regional ambulance.
- *Acquisition of prescribed medicines for mothers and children, providing them at no or low cost, depending on need.
- *Total requested: \$1200

We are very grateful to RPCV for their continued interest in and support for KGAP project proposals!



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*If we have misspelled your name or forgotten to acknowledge you, please, please, let us know! We are so grateful to everyone who donates to KGAP and want to make sure that all are acknowl-
 edged (correctly!) for their help and support.*

With Deepest Sadness

Jeri Pearson, our beloved friend and KGAP accompanier, passed away on Friday, June 19th, in Brooklyn, New York, where she was visiting her daughter, son-in-law, and granddaughter. Jeri went out to shop for groceries and was tragically and fatally hit by a car. There are no word to describe the shock, grief, and sadness we feel.

Jeri lived in the country, near Danbury, Wisconsin. She was a KGAP-sponsored accompanier in Chaculá in 1998. She returned many times with KGAP delegations. With her husband Marty, she spent an extended period in the village at a time when the KGAP scholarship project really began to take form. Jeri was an integral part in the creation and coordination of this project. She was a true compañera, solidaria, and gran amiga to many of us in the Guatemala solidarity network. And she was beloved by so many people in the village of Chaculá. She was truly one of the most generous, sincere, and openhearted individuals that one could hope to know.

We will miss Jeri deeply and wish to extend our heart-felt sympathy to all her family members and dear friends.



*Gaspar Paiz family with Jeri Pearson and her namesake,
Maria Jerina.*

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.

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