

KGAP newsletter

Summer Greetings to All!

by *Connie Vanderhyden, KGAP Coordinator*

Recently I was asked to write a letter to send out with the next NISGUA newsletter, addressing my long-term involvement with Guatemala, accompaniment and NISGUA. It was just a letter, brief and concise, and it made me think that I would like to say much more about accompaniment and what it has meant and continues to mean to me over all these years.

The first time I heard the word accompaniment in this context was the fall of 1993 when I was asked to join a Witness for Peace delegation on the refugee return to Nueva Esperanza-Chaculá. In preparation for the January 1994 journey and during training in Mexico prior to meeting the refugee community, I learned that Guatemalans recognized the importance of international solidarity while living in refugee camps. International accompaniment on the returns and in the communities thereafter became one of their 6 demands before returning to Guatemala. They believed it would provide a measure of security, moral support, and a link to international communities. We knew when GAP (Guatemalan Accompaniment Project) was created the need for accompaniment was not going to fade anytime soon. It has expanded from returned refugee communities to include genocide survivors providing testimonials in many important trials and activists fighting for human and environmental rights. Of course, this indicates that the political, social and economic situation in Guatemala continues to be very difficult. However, I believe that it also has to do with the nature of accompaniment itself.

Since living as an accompanier in Guatemala for extended periods and short visits, I have realized that the qualities of accompaniment flow into everything I have done and continue to do in my personal and professional life: striving to be truly present for one another; listening humbly and respectfully; striving to understand and honor differences; providing space for others to exercise their rights; working for equality and systemic change; cultivating compassion, friendship and love. What I mean to say is, accompaniment is a beautiful example of how to BE in life!

It is an honor to accompany in Guatemala. I know that I speak for many who have visited Chaculá on a delegation when I say that we, also, feel very well “accompanied” by our Guatemalan friends. This is truly a mutual relationship, one in which we are striving for the same objectives. It is a deep friendship, born out of shared risks and experiences in an environment of mutual respect and equality. I am forever grateful to our Guatemalan partners for patiently creating the atmosphere in which we learn to step back, listen, respond and support.

This has been a difficult time for everyone worldwide. We haven’t been able to be physically present in Guatemala for a year and a half at least. Many of us are just beginning to spend more time with friends and family here at home. However, we have found ways to stay connected with our Guatemalan partners and are really looking forward to the time when we can truly “be present” again and share more experiences and friendship moving forward.

I hope that all KGAP supporters realize that you, too, are part of this accompaniment journey! Sustaining this 27-year relationship and supporting healthcare and education initiatives in Chaculá is all possible because of your commitment and collaboration!

THANK YOU from the bottom of my heart!
Connie Vanderhyden

Revised NGO Law Threatens Freedom of Association in Guatemala

Over 70 organizations (including KGAP) express our profound concern regarding the amendments to Bill 5257, a law governing the activities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), that went into effect Monday, June 21st, following the Guatemalan Constitutional Court’s (CC) denial of legal appeals against the amendments. This decision occurred in the context of what many experts identify as a cooptation of the CC that seeks to uphold the interests of corrupt elite powers

***Past newsletters and photos can be
viewed online at www.kgap.org.***

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A Letter from Jubinal Carrillo Funes

Instituto Básico Director, Teacher and Lawyer

I am writing to you and the KGAP organization to thank you for the 2021 donation we received for the education of our community, Colonia Nueva Esperanza Chaculá, Nentón, Huehuetenango. This project began in 1997 and I was one of the first scholarship recipients! To date, a total of 109 students have received scholarships. Many have graduated from the high school level as teachers, accountants, nurse assistants, agronomists or with preparation for a bachelor's degree in science and letters. Many of the scholarship students have gone on to complete university degrees in medicine, agronomy, law and professional nursing. Sixty percent of those who graduated have jobs working in our fields and forty percent do not, due to the high unemployment rate in our country. Thanks to the support received from K/GAP, coordinated by our friend Connie, this scholarship program has been of great benefit to us since most of the families of Nueva Esperanza Chaculá, have limited economic resources. Our government does not support education and healthcare projects in rural communities, nor promote and encourage strategies that generate employment for all Guatemalans. For this reason, many children and young people in our community would not be able to continue their studies at a level that would allow them to develop as people and have a decent life. Today our community also benefits from your economic support and solidarity by sponsoring all 65 students at the middle-school level (Instituto Básico) from Chaculá and neighboring communities. Some families who have many children receive financial support for primary education as well. On many occasions we have used some of the funding to improve the infrastructure of the classrooms where the students receive their classes.

We want to thank Connie and our friend, Gerina (Jeri Pearson). Both dedicated themselves to make this project for the education of our returned refugee community successful. We are forever grateful we were able to meet and share our situation with Gerina and we will always remember her.

KGAP supporters, thank you very much for your support and solidarity for our community of Nueva Esperanza Chaculá!

Sincerely,

Jubinal Carrillo Funes
(Translated by Connie Vanderhyden)

Current KGAP Scholarship

Recipients

José Carlos Vargas Ramírez
Manuel Basilio López
Adamaris López
Yorvi Gabril Montejó Gutiérrez
Rosa Nallely García RosYeni Anabel
Sheily Yuleny Ros García
Linda Domingo Diego
Mateo Adolfo Vargas Ramírez
Karen Mishelle Mejía García
Emanuel Carrillo López
Juan Carlos Cardona Díaz
Karen Lliseth Montejó Muñoz
Yeni Anabel Domingo Tórres
Mike Brian López Morales
Humberto Andrés Morales
Yuleidi Maritza Jiménez Méndez
Melvin Alexis Páiz Mejía
Axel Silvestre Díaz



Manuel Basilio López Garcia, 16
Accounting
Privado Mixto Camposeco
Jacaltenango Huehuetenango, 2022



Linda Domingo Diego, 19
Public Administration
Instituto de Perito en Administración Pública
Huehuetenango, 2021

Chaculá COVID 19 Update

Chaculá did not have a lot of cases of Covid 19 during the first year of the pandemic, due to quarantining and isolation. However, since January of 2021, the community has opened up and there has been a rise in cases. There are different opinions about how to handle the situation, as in most countries in the world. Currently vaccinations have only been extended to elders and those who have compromising health conditions. At this time villagers have to travel to a larger town to receive vaccinations. Things are progressing slowly, there is not much confidence in the government, and no one is sure when there will be more availability. Schools were open for in-person classes in January and February but have since reverted back to students studying from home. Computer and internet access is limited so teachers in the community must deliver materials and assignments to their students. Many of the high school scholarship students are also studying from home, like last year, and most depend upon their phones for reading and completing assignments. Somehow, they are able to complete their classes and stay on course. We have received many letters from students this year, expressing gratitude and sending their quarterly grade reports. I am always inspired by their dedication and energy to keep on moving forward, despite great obstacles.

We are currently in communication with community leaders to create a plan to establish an emergency fund to help with situations that arise as a result of COVID 19. This could include providing transportation to vaccination sites, food and other essentials for families who are in quarantine, and any other difficulties that require special attention at this difficult time. Please consider a tax-deductible donation to KGAP to get this fund off the ground! Thank you for your continuing support!



*Rosa Nallely García Ros, 20
Business Administration
Centro Educativo Comunitario San José Tz'isbaj
Aldea San José Tz'isbaj, 2022 2022*



*Mateo Adolfo Vargas Ramírez, 20
University Preparation and Auto Mechanics
Instituto Nacional de Educación Diversificada
Jacaltenango, 2021*

**Donations are tax deductible and
can be sent to:**

KGAP

**c/o Connie Vanderhyden
E9048 Pierce Hill Road
Viroqua, WI 54665**

**THANK YOU TO OUR
MOST RECENT DONORS!**

*Susan Nesbit and Jerry McGeorge
Bill Katra and Marta Martinez
Clifford Chang
Bill and Susan Townsley
Maureen and John Karlstad
Jim Pattison and Martha Buche
Susan Pope (in memory of Jeri Pearson)
Bruce Bland
Bill Calkins
Deborah Cooter
Bill Brooke
CASA
Ellen Brooks and Dave Hackett*

We are concerned by the power the revised law gives to the Guatemalan government to permanently close any NGO if its activities are deemed to be in violation of the “public order.” With this vague language, activities that may be considered a disruption to the public order are open to executive branch interpretation. This power could be used to arbitrarily limit or inhibit the work of civil society organizations that criticize or question actions taken by the state, violating their constitutional right to free expression. Civil society organizations that conduct protests and other public actions, and human rights groups that accompany them or monitor government response to such activities, could be summarily forced to close. In addition, these amendments will give the government greater control over international funds, and present overly burdensome requirements for NGOs that could bar groups with limited resources from registering. Even more concerning, these burdens would most likely disproportionately impact Indigenous and rural organizations.

We reject the implementation of this revised law, given that it violates the freedoms of expression and association and creates a hostile environment for those working to defend human rights. The revised law seeks to silence any public criticism or action that may threaten the state’s power, thereby perpetuating schemes of corruption and impunity. We echo the call by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and its Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression for the Government of Guatemala to “revoke these reforms that restrict public space, contradict freedom of association, freedom of expression and disproportionately make more difficult political participation and the defense of human rights.” If the law moves forward, we highlight that members of the international community will be closely monitoring its implementation and impacts. We stand in solidarity with Guatemalan social movements in the face of these regressive measures.

(www.nisgua.org/nisguablog)

KICKAPOO/GUATEMALA ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT (KGAP) see www.kgap.org for more information. KGAP is a project of Youth Initiative High School, a 501c3 nonprofit organization. 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. More information about NISGUA can be found at <https://nisgua.org>