

KGAP newsletter

Warm Greetings from Connie Vanderhyden

by Connie Vanderhyden, KGAP Coordinator

Upon receiving this KGAP newsletter, I hope you are enjoying a beautiful summer with friends and family! In this edition, we are very grateful to be able to share with you many words written by our friends from Chaculá following our March visit, the first time we have returned to Guatemala since 2019!

Our March delegation consisted of a dynamic group of women: Carolyn Gillette from Wyoming, Andi Alexander from Iowa, Lisa Anderson and Connie from Viroqua. We spent nearly a week in Chaculá with YIHS chaperones, Shawn Lavoie and Natalie Hinahara, and 12 YIHS senior students: Freya Rising, Jesse Porter, Ada Lenarz, Tobias Hunt, Clover Cole De Clercq, Fischer Olson, Adyn Brudos, Kevin Miro, James Benton, Oliver Krieger Fritsch, Zirelia Leinberger, and Rohan Laurdan. This was the 10th student delegation from Viroqua to Guatemala since 2001.

We were welcomed with open arms and enjoyed so many wonderful connections with the children, the youth, the teachers, and families in the community. The YIHS students stayed with families and had a full schedule of activities, planned by the teachers, in collaboration with Shawn and Natalie. We had a beautiful excursion by pickup truck to Laguna Brava, a most spectacular lake with cenotes, just a few hours from Chaculá. The YIHS students planned and taught art, music and sports activities for the Básico students (7-9 graders), which were very well received. There were hikes and sports activities, seminars, and a cultural night where the Básico and YIHS students performed. Every night, the YIHS students gathered to share their

observations, experiences and feelings. The adults in our group participated as well and we all gained a lot by listening to one another and sharing our heartfelt reflections. As in previous student trips, I was very moved by the excellent guidance Shawn and Natalie provided and by the sincere participation of all the students, dedicated to feeling deeply and gaining knowledge and understanding.

And for me, this was a reunion with beloved friends in Chaculá. I am so grateful we are able to travel again and that the community survived the pandemic quite well. They described the first year as having been extremely difficult, as the whole country was locked down and their community chose to follow very strict guidelines. However, Chaculá is organized as a cooperative and they have a system of communication and governance which served them well throughout the pandemic. There were only 3 deaths and very few people were gravely ill. It looks like the community is thriving now and we noticed an increase in commerce and economic activity.

Meanwhile, there is a lot of political, economic and social turmoil in Guatemala at large. Elections are taking place as I write this letter. We have included a short reflection from Claire Bransky, former KGAP/NISGUA accompanier to give you her perspective and I encourage you to check the NISGUA website (www.nisgua.org) for more in-depth information and updates, if you are interested. The letters from Chaculá are all directed to YOU - our cherished supporters and donors! Please know that KGAP depends on YOU and we are forever grateful for all your support!



*Connie Vanderhyden (second from left) with Doña Rosa's and her daughters Mérida and Juana
photo by Andi Alexander ©2023*

Letter of Thanks from Jubinal Carrillo Funes

Teacher and Director of the Básico Institute

Hello dear KGAP and YIHS friends,

On behalf of the education committee of Colonia Nueva Esperanza-Chaculá and the teachers of the Básico Institute and primary school of our community, I am happy to offer this update.

Since 1994, when our community of Chaculá was founded, we have had the unconditional solidarity and support of the NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION KICKAPOO-GUATEMALA PROJECT (KGAP), represented by our great friend Connie Vanderhyden, who is always the link between our community and your Wisconsin community.

We know that you came to our community with the purpose of accompanying us to guarantee that the army and other institutions of the Government of Guatemala would respect our human rights as a returned community, because in that year of our return there were still confrontations between the Guatemalan army and the opposition group called URNG.

Through this accompaniment and during the months of coexistence with our brothers and sisters in solidarity who came from the United States to our community, we developed a sense of solidarity and a feeling of love and affection. We will always love and respect you as a great part of the development of our community of Chaculá. I remember meeting Connie in 1996, and asking for her support in obtaining a scholarship to continue studying at the high school level. Connie and our great friend, Gerina (former KGAP accompanier) were able to start a scholarship fund, with support from their communities, and I received one of the scholarships to begin my studies to become a teacher. That was the origin of this education project that we have today and from which many members of my community have already benefited.

We know that you work hard to raise the funds to support the education of our community of Chaculá. This year we received a KGAP donation of \$31,000 for scholarships for students studying in the Básico Institute, high school and university, and to cover expenses we incur for the proper functioning of our Básico Institute. (This donation included \$5,000 from our great friend, Marty Pearson, husband of our beloved Gerina and \$1,000 from Martha Pierce and CRLN, who are also always with us in our struggle.) In addition, we received \$4,340 from KGAP for the purchase of school supplies and computers. Another donation of \$1,347 came to us for primary school reading books. This donation was raised by Kevin Miro, a YIHS student who visited us in March of this year, along with the group of students that Shawn Lavoie and Connie Vanderhyden brought to Chaculá. Thank you KEVIN!!! We also know that all of the YIHS students who visited this year sponsored a fundraising event to gather funds for scholarships for our students. They raised \$1,770 and we are very grateful for their efforts.

Since the beginning of the education fund in 1996, 135 students have graduated from a diversified career level and many of this number have completed a college degree. Sixty percent now have jobs for the betterment of their families and our community.

Therefore, we are very grateful to you for your consistent support and we hope to continue counting on your solidarity to move ahead with the development of our community. We hope Connie and Shawn Lavoie (Juanito) will continue their visits with the YIHS students who will always be well received by our students!

Thank you, thank you, thank you and a thousand thanks to all who support us, our most sincere greetings and affection to all of you from the Wisconsin communities and beyond.

Sincerely,
Jubinal Carrillo Funes,
On Behalf Of My Fellow Teachers

From YIHS to Chaculá: How I raised Thirteen-Hundred USD for Chaculá's School In Less than Three Weeks

By Kevin Miro, Youth Initiative High School Student

When coming up with a YIHS senior project, Guatemala was the last idea that arose. Before that, I was thinking about Afghanistan, Ukraine, or even Puerto Rico, where my father is from. But in September of 2022, the focus began to switch to Guatemala. I was on my own in Guatemala at the time, attending a wealthy school located within the capital, to experience the country where I was born. But that's a different story.

When going to the Colegio Waldorf Guatemala, I started to ask what were some of the most pressing issues in Guatemala. Everyone said the same two things: corruption and child malnutrition. Almost immediately these issues I saw as too big for me to take on. I continued to look for issues that are a big problem in Guatemala. Guatemala is not a country that has many opportunities, and so I also looked at immigration, poverty, and femicide.

When I returned to the U.S., I was in a pretty bad spot. I was the only senior who did not have their project nailed down. I knew that I had to get on it quickly, as deadlines were looming closer and closer. I began to think more and more about partnering up with KGAP, a nonprofit organization that I knew about that had worked with Chaculá for many years. But I knew I did want to not finalize it until I got the word that I would be returning with the YIHS student trip in March, 2023. In October of 2022, I received the much-anticipated email, confirming that I was cleared to return to Guatemala. I knew now that I had a basic idea to look at for my senior project. And so, in November of 2022, I finally submitted my papers to have part of my project be a fundraiser for Chaculá with a KGAP partnership. My project consisted of writing a short book detailing my relationship with Guatemala, and some sort of work with KGAP. Towards the end of 2022, I began to finalize the plan. And right before I left with some of my classmates to go to Guatemala, Connie Vanderhyden and I had reached a plan of what I could do.

The two of us decided that I could raise money for the school in Chaculá. After the Covid-19 pandemic, this school saw a huge influx of students, therefore straining the resources they had. Jubinal, the school director, had reached out to Connie to ask for more money to accommodate the new students that were at the school. Connie

had passed on the list, and I spent a good amount of time looking at it until I came to the books. There was a request for a purchase of 195 reading books for elementary school students at Q 50.00 each Q 9,750.00 (\$1,246.75). This seemed like a reasonable amount of money to fundraise in the short time that I had.



On the YIHS student 3-week trip to Guatemala, we stayed for a week in Chaculá. There I was able to tour the school and meet the children that were going to use the resources that I funded. I also met with Jubinal to briefly talk about the plan. My idea was to take three weeks upon returning to the U.S. to create a GoFundMe page, dedicated to my cause to raise money for the school. On the page, this was the description of the purpose:

One of the most successful things that the people of Chaculá have achieved is their education. While there is no high school in the village, they have created very successful elementary and middle schools, inviting children from other communities to attend. KGAP has developed an annual education fund to help support both schools and to fund scholarships for students to attend high school in other cities. There are many students this year attending classes in Chaculá that need additional resources for the schools. One urgent need is funding to purchase elementary-level reading books for the primary grades. This page is to raise money for them to buy books for primary school students. Our goal is to raise \$1246.75 by the end of March. Your money will go to a great cause, as children in Chaculá will be able to enjoy books that they can read throughout their childhood, teaching them skills that they will need later in life.

Once I returned from Guatemala, it was time to get to work. I began by creating a page where people could make a donation online. I also had to write a short piece explaining what this fundraiser was for, and write about the history of Chaculá for anyone who was not familiar with the village. At the community presentation about our school trip to Guatemala, I was allowed to reveal my fundraiser and the real work began. Over the course of the next three weeks, I was constantly advertising my fundraiser at every opportunity given.

Letter Of Thanks from The Básico Institute Parent Representatives

Colonia Nueva Esperanza, Chaculá, Nentón, Huehuetenango, Guatemala May 9, 2023.

Chaculá Institute Parents' Committee, Felipe Gómez Domingo, President and Mateo Domingo Tórrez, Secretary

Dear Connie, KGAP and YIHS friends,

We send you our warmest greetings, wishing you all the best in your work and family lives. It is an honor for us to write this letter to you, in order to share with you all the feelings and emotions that you have awakened in our hearts year after year.

We want to tell you that your visit in March of this year gave our children many great experiences. They will keep memories of the moments lived with the young people and other friends who visited us from the United States forever. The language differences made verbal communication between students difficult. However, the distance between hearts is very short, since actions make up for everything that cannot be expressed in words. We are happy to know that every year we will welcome your visit, perhaps it will not be the same students who come and who receive you, but the friendship and affection will remain the same.

We also take this opportunity to express our most sincere gratitude for the support you have given us with the payment of tuition for the 78 students attending the Básico Institute and for the equipment for the Computer Center, which is extremely useful in order to instruct young people in the use of new technologies, because these days all kinds of work require technological knowledge. The school supplies purchased with your support, will be very useful for each of our children during this school year, so as parents we are committed to ensure that they give them the proper use. We are aware that you make a great effort to gather the resources with which you support the people of our community, which is why your help is very special to us.

You are always welcome in our community and our homes, so we look forward to your visit for many years to come.

Sincerely,

Chaculá Institute Parents' Committee, Felipe Gómez Domingo, President and Mateo Domingo Tórrez, Secretary

News from the Chaculá Adult Literacy Center

by Eulalio and Umberto

Once again, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to you for always being with us and for supporting our efforts. Thanks to your generous donors, we have been able to continue our work and look forward to the years ahead.

Your donation of \$2,100 in 2023 has served to fund the following:

- *School supplies for all students
- *Teacher trainings (including transportation, food and housing)
- *Student orientation activities
- *Student workbooks
- *Snack supplies
- *Repairs to the Literacy Center structure due to rain damage
- *Transportation and other expenses for all students and teachers to attend the annual ceremony for Guatemala Literacy Day in Nentón on September 8, 2023



Eulalio & Umberto, Literacy Coordinators



Primary Students with thier new backpacks, provided through funds from KGAP



Youth Initiative student delegation performing for the Community during the Cultural Night activites.

Shawn LaVoie, YIHS teacher, with a combined class of YIHS students and Chaculá studnets.



Básico students and their teachers





Lisa, Connie, Carolyn and Andi at Laguna Brava



Students going for a swim at the cenote



University and High School scholarship students



The KGAP Delegation to Chaculá, including all of the adults and the students of Youth Initiative High School

From YIHS to Chaculá, Continued from page 3

Connie, Computer Teacher Wilmer Mendoza Díaz, Shawn and Natalie

I emailed the link to many other people and local organizations to post it online, asking the public to support it. I asked Youth Initiative to also support me by posting it online in the Weekender and on social media. Looking back, social media was a big part of how I was able to get so many donations. We were able to make the set amount of money, meeting the deadline just in the nick of time, plus an extra \$100. The final tally for the fundraiser was \$1347.02. With this money now ready, I finally made the transfers and wrote a check. As of this writing, June 25, 2023, the check has been delivered to KGAP. I know that the village of Chaculá will use the money for good use, to continue to strive to give every child a good education. I applaud them for all of their hard work and look forward to returning within the next year to visit.

Thank-You Letter From the Computer Teacher

Dear Connie and KGAP/YIHS friends,

I would like to thank you for supporting us with the purchase of 8 computers for the computer center which is a benefit for all the students in the Instituto Básico in Colonia Nueva Esperanza Chaculá.

I would like you to know that at the beginning of the 2023 school year the computer center had a total of 20 computers in bad condition. For this reason, I had to hire the services of a technician who cleaned, formatted and repaired them. This left a total of 15 computers working properly, no longer a sufficient number to teach my computer or technology classes to the students.

I have a total of 41 students in first year Básico and even when I tried to work in small groups, the computers were always insufficient. The students did not work comfortably because 3 had to work on one computer. In second and third level Básico, there were 2 students on each computer.

That is why I feel deeply grateful to you for the support you gave to the school to buy these 8 computers, forming a total of 23 machines that are working properly. Now it is our responsibility to take care of them and use them correctly. We have protected them from dust by creating a more airtight room and placing covers on each computer.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you for the effort and dedication that you have given for many years in your organization, always supporting us with scholarships, tuition payments and some needs that have arisen in the Institute. I am a graduate of the Institute and received a KGAP scholarship so it is a pleasure for me to work today as a teacher at the Institute. For all of this, thank you very much!

Sincerely, Wilmer Alberto Mendoza Díaz.

Básico Students in the computer lab



Reflection from YIHS 2023 Guatemala Trip Participants

In the middle of February, 2023, twelve YIHS students along with two teachers departed from the small town of Viroqua, Wisconsin, to spend three weeks in various places in Guatemala.

We spent one of those weeks in Chaculá, which is a town supported by KGAP. Families from the Básico Institute put us up in their homes, and we spent all of the days we were there interacting and doing activities with the students.

We were very touched by this community that KGAP has helped to nurture and wanted to find a way to give back for all that they did for us.

When we returned, we threw a “Flash Taco” fundraiser—which brought in many people involved with the school and K-GAP, as well as others from the greater area, wishing to support K-GAP's cause. We ended up raising much more than we initially expected, and this will all be used for educational scholarships for students in Chaculá.

We're grateful for everyone who helped make the fundraiser a success, the Chaculá community, and all those who've worked and continue to work to support the K-GAP Initiative.

Sincerely,

Freya Rising, Jesse Porter, Ada Lenarz, Tobias Hunt, Amelia (Clover) Cole De Clercq, Fischer Olson, Adyn Brudos, Kevin Miro, James Benton, Oliver Krieger Fritsch, Zirelia Leinberger, and Rohan Laurdan.

Note: The YIHS students' event raised \$1,769.62 for the KGAP-Chaculá Education Fund.



Accompanier Perspectives: How do we struggle in these times?

by Claire Bransky (they/them), former NISGUA Internacionalista, wrote this update during their time as a volunteer with NISGUA. (KGAP was one of Claire's sponsoring communities.)

Dear NISGUA family,

Almost exactly one year after leaving staff, I'm honored to come back for a month as an accompanier. Frankly, it's a disturbing political scene to return to. You may have heard people say that Guatemala feels like it's returning to the 1980s — it's true, and it's present on every corner and in every conversation.

It's easy to lose hope right when we most need to get rigorous about building a positive future. Perhaps the greatest lesson our Guatemalan partners continue to teach us is the need for collectivity in our struggles; none of us know everything but together we know quite a lot. So today I want to invite you to join us in grappling with some hard questions that I'll share below — can you talk about them with at least one other person tonight? Would you email us with your reflections? We need and want to hear from you. When I first came to be an accompanier six years ago, genocide survivors were certainly being denied the justice they deserve, but there was a sense of real possibility for transitional justice cases. Efraín Ríos Montt was the first former head of state *in the world* to be found guilty of genocide in 2013, previously “untouchable” military leaders were found guilty in the Molina Theissen disappearance case, and it looked like the historic Military Diary case was going to move forward.

These days, the vast majority of judges and prosecutors who made these historic advances possible have had to flee Guatemala or are facing criminalization and threats here. Zury Ríos, daughter of Ríos Montt, is forecasted to win the first round of presidential elections in June. Most experts identify the attacks on anti-corruption judges and prosecutors as a crucial part of Ríos' long-term strategy to take power. After all, her inscription as a candidate is clearly outlawed in the Constitution, which does not allow the children of people convicted of genocide to run for president.

Note: Please find Claire's complete article at www.nisgua.org under the title given above.

Miriam Carillo, Kindergarten teacher and KGAP education project coordinator, enjoying a ride in a tuk tuk.

Reflections On How We All Smile In The Same Language...

March 2023

by Caroline Gillette, March Delegation Participant

Over one of our first cups of coffee together, my roommate Andi shared a favorite saying of hers “Don’t believe everything you think” I deeply considered her words from then on. I found myself in a familiar landscape having fallen in love with equatorial flora and fauna I knew as a child and now I could experience a whole new story. I have been following K-GAP for as long as it has been in place and I knew some of the stories. To “witness” this place in person and through the voices in Chaculá will forever be a part of me.

I traveled to Guatemala with Connie, my sister from another mother. My journey to Chaculá combined new soul mates, solidarity and water, some of my favorite things. While I do not speak the language, the message of people and place were very clear and it ignited all my other senses to work harder to take in what surrounded me. We teamed up with the youth initiative high school group on this trip, we shared meals with families which offered a personal touch stone to this place. After all, we all smile in the same language, especially as a chicken might walk through the kitchen and the taste of homemade tortillas warmed the evening.

One morning my new friend Lisa and I were playing with a young boy as his parents were in a meeting. We played cards and he continually looked at me with his unbroken gaze and knew something was different. He directed his Spanish conversation to my English speaking ears and had a quizzical look, as in, I think we are totally communicating. We had fun and shared bilingual laughter. It felt good to me that language did not get in the way of our play.

Visiting this beautiful place was all about walking in the village, and we visited the schools, the literacy center, the clinic, and attended a multicultural talent show. One day we all; students, and their host families, jumped in the back of three trucks and traveled over the mountain, through the cloud forest to Laguna Brava. After almost two hours of rock and roll standing in the truck and a walk through the forest we were dazzled by teal colored lake. We all play and swim in the same language, this will be seared in my memory of one of the most beautiful “swimming holes” ever.

I felt like was a teenager again in that we traveled with a high school group which offered a fresh perspective. Their unabashed enthusiasm and ability to soak up new ideas, dance, eat, laugh and reflect on their empowerment, gave me a new hope for the future. Thank you to Shawn and Natalie for creating and guiding this life changing trip for youth, encouraging their voices in a chorus of social responsibility and love of other cultures – you both are an inspiration!

Thank you, Connie, for your legacy of solidarity, I witnessed it in the smiles and tears of the people of Chaculá, they are so grateful for you. Thank you for letting me join you.



Carolyn, André Kanek, and Lisa playing a game

Many Thanks to our Recent Donors! January through June, 2023

Dancing Waters
Marty Pearson
Roberta Ducharme
David and Diane Banner
Barry Jensen and Maura Otis
Marty Clearfield and Bonnie Wright
Jon and Peggy Traver
Paul and Paula Grenier
Harriet Behar
Mary Jane Rondeau
Sharon Miessner
Nancy and Ken Garden
Bud and Marjorie Roegge
Fred Dick
John and Susan Miller
David Mesenbring
Vince and Dawn Hundt (Paxam)
Paul Bergquist and Carole Austin
Don and Mary Stirling
Dave Ware and Tamsen Morgan

Melanie and Augusto Bordelois
Martin Sellers and Nancy Hartje
Hollis Pfitsch and Maggie Kawinski
Robert McDowell
CRLN
Jane Mahoney
Lars and Corina Bergan
Polly, Peter and Daniel Edmunds
Lisa Rock
Marta Engel
Connie Champnoise and Art Plachinski
Dan and Dianne Hendricks
Allan Beatty
Barbara Gerlach
Keith Steffen
Kay Berkson and Sid Hollander
Sue Drake
Judy Berra
Jane Furchgott
Phyllis and Bill Pengelly

Shawn Lavoie
Susan Pope
Roger Bertsch and Carla Christ
YIHS Guatemala Trip participants
Kathy and Paul Fairchild
Lamar Janes and Lynda Schaller
Bill and Susan Townsley
Kevin Miro
Maureen Kalrlsatd, in-kind

**Donations to KGAP
are tax deductible
& can be sent to:**
KGAP c/o
Connie Vanderhyden
E9048 Pierce Hill Road
Viroqua, WI 54665

KICKAPOO/GUATEMALA ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT (KGAP) see 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 nigua.org