

October 2018

Dear Friends of Centro Maya Project,

When I was walking down the main street in San Juan this summer a woman's smiling face called out to me. Maria Elena, the mother of six surviving children, was the first parent I met when I went to San Juan to volunteer at the small center for children with disabilities 18 years ago. Her family's story is unbelievably sad, yet she lives with beautiful dreams for her older children. Leaving her small store I was filled with joy. Life for many is about Hope and Promise.

Over the years Centro Maya Project has aspired to give people hope by improving the quality of everyday life. For some it is the monthly distribution of food, for others it is payment for necessary medications, emergency medical care or hearing aids, and for many it is the opportunity to send children to school.

My life in San Juan is not all about work. I have the luxury of visiting my friends, the families Centro Maya Project has helped for the last 15 years. I attend weddings, graduations and funerals. I meet the babies of young women I knew as children. The years in San Juan have taught me that caring about someone's struggle does not make it mine – it becomes Ours.

This year I have a special story of Hope and Promise to share with you.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Nakamaru

H₂Ope and Promise

Last summer eighteen volunteers from the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the Quad Cities arrived in San Juan to build a home for a large family. Two afternoons we took breaks from construction and drove to mountain villages so that we could deliver donated shoes, clothes and books. The level of poverty in these villages is severe. During our visits we discovered that there is no potable water, making life in these villages even more dire. Residents hang three-liter pop bottles from trees to catch rainwater during the rainy season mid-March to November. The rest of the year they walk 11 km (6.8 miles) to a small river to collect water and carry it home. It became clear that Water, a basic human right, is unavailable to more than 3,000 people living in these communities.

Centro Maya Project decided to address this challenge.

Earlier in the year, local resident and board representative Benedicto Ixtamer Perez spent a day with two visitors, introducing them to the beauty, tranquility and poverty of residents living on or near Lake Atitlan and telling them of the work of our organization. In April, they contacted us, explained that they are board members of the Adelpia Foundation and invited us to apply for a one-time grant. Incredible timing! Our grant application, Water for Mountain Villages, described our goal of transporting, storing and maintaining a water supply system derived from mountain streams for four communities: Panyebar, Chucamac, Panacal1 and Panacal2. We were fortunate to have our application accepted at the generous level of \$5,500 and combined it with an earlier gift of \$5,000 from an anonymous donor which we earmarked for a special project.

Our water project became energized when I was in San Juan this summer and learned that these four communities had formed a 10-person water committee. In April they met with Engineers Without Borders (Denver, Colorado) and five other organizations to address their water problem. These organizations agreed to design and build a water supply system contingent upon the communities purchasing land with a water source. The water committee held village meetings and gained approval to purchase land with three small rivers and a spring. Every child and adult was to donate \$6.50 before a \$6,600 loan came due August 31; however, the level of poverty made it impossible to collect these funds, endangering the project. Could Centro Maya Project could help secure this land? Four-hundred and fifty adults attended a meeting in which we set conditions for the land purchase. The water committee then went door to door to collect ten pages of signatures and thumbprints of resident adults who accepted these conditions. These joyful pages are now attached to the land title.

Our limited but critical role guarantees a basic human right to 3,000 people: WATER.

This is a Promise and gives all of us Hope.

HOPE: Helping Other People Eat

Helping other people eat . . .

Our largest program over the years has been HOPE: Helping Other People Eat. An increased number of families – forty! – now receive food, with half of the families living in the mountain villages. Because the program has grown we needed to change the location of our food distribution to the house of Maria Cholotio Hernandez and Benedicto. This change has provided us with greater opportunities to get to know each other. We continue to supply corn, black beans, rice, sugar, powdered milk, high-protein cereal, salt, cooking oil and eggs, along with laundry soap, toothpaste and vitamins. Each family brings baskets and gunny sacks, an environmentally caring way to carry the food home.

Many of us love to grow and eat our own food. Our organic garden is very productive, supplying families in the food assistance program with black beans, onions, beets, carrots, cilantro, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage. It is healthful, fresh and delicious!

. . . and hear . . .

This year our hearing aid program had a major crisis when our audiometer quit working. We continued our work in the clinic but could only make adjustments for individuals who already had a hearing aid. Fortunately a volunteer group arriving at the clinic brought a small portable audiometer to get us through until a more reliable unit could be found. Audiology Consultants, Davenport, Iowa, answered our need by donating a newer modern audiometer. Another volunteer brought it to San Juan! GN ReSound, a Minnesota-based hearing aid company, generously donated 50 new hearing aids, the fourth year the program has benefited from their kindness. Our hearing aid program has become famous around Lake Atitlán, with some patients traveling up to two hours for an appointment. Regina Julieta maintains the program year-round by giving evaluations and providing follow-up care.

. . . and go to school . . .

El Fondo Para Mi Escuela, a scholarship program for children, began 10 years ago by Friends from Washington. The goal was to help one child from many different families receive an education kindergarten through high school, thereby lifting up everyone in the family. Centro Maya Project selected more students with special needs and from single-parent families. This year eight more young people graduated from high school. We are extremely happy with these results.

. . . and be healthy

Medical assistance continues to provide emergency care. Two years ago eight-year-old Roberto was diagnosed with leukemia. After months of hospitalization in Guatemala City he returned home to San Juan. Last year he was well enough to attend school. In August, while walking our dog, I passed a park where a father was playing football with his two sons in an extremely competitive way. The boys were running, chasing, kicking the ball – wanting to beat their father – and laughing. It was such a typical San Juan scene to watch, and then I realized one of the boys was wearing a medical mask. It was Roberto! My eyes filled with tears of happiness, and Ixquic, my dog, and I hiked through the coffee fields and climbed the mountain.