

Mayan Health & Education Project



Dear Friends,

The junior high school supported by the Mayan Health and Education Project gives Guatemalan children the opportunity for a better life.

It hardly seems possible that a new school year is already underway at our junior high school in Huixoc, Guatemala. I made two more trips to Guatemala in 2006 and saw the encouraging results of our efforts to improve health and education in this remote part of the world. I am pleased by the progress made in reaching our goals and wanted to report back to all of you who have so generously supported this work.

Last March, I again traveled to Guatemala to work with Compañero en Salud, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides surgical screening in rural areas of the country. Our international group of nine volunteers examined over 400 people with health problems in the north-central highlands. We provided medical treatment for many and were able to offer life-altering surgery to about 30 of those.

I returned to Huixoc in November— my 7th trip to the country— to work in the Huixoc medical clinic completed and equipped by our project in 2002. I also saw exciting developments in the school we initiated in the village last year. A new bi-lingual curriculum, in Spanish and the local Mayan dialect, has been introduced with the donated lap-top computers we carried from Vancouver.

These steps forward would not be possible without the support of many people. Donations come in different forms: computer exper-

tise and equipment; communication design, printing and distribution; help with fund raising; medical supplies and drugs; Spanish-language books and software programs; accounting assistance and personal support — in addition to generous financial contributions. Your contributions help not only the patients treated in our clinic and the 59 individual children now attending our school, but also their families and the larger community.

Every time I return home from Guatemala, I realize how fortunate we are to live in a country that offers its citizens many prospects for good health, education and employment — opportunities that are not shared by the majority of Mayans in Central America. I believe that projects such as ours can, little by little, help to change this situation. Please read more on the following pages about how your support is helping to improve chances for a better life for the Mayan people of Guatemala.

Thanks again for your interest.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen".

Ellen Coburn
Vancouver
March 2007



Education for a better future ...



Teacher Clara Luz helps new Grade 7 students with application forms.

Our Grade 7 class has completed its first year and a new group started classes in January. For the first time, children in Huixoc are able to attend school in the village beyond the level of Grade 6. Twenty-nine of the initial group of 30 students successfully completed the year, while only one student was not ready to move on and will repeat the grade. Twenty-eight students are eligible to advance to Grade 8, and 31 new students began Grade 7.

During my latest trip to Huixoc, we again held a meeting of parents, students and teachers to reinforce commitment to completing junior high school. (Students accepted into Grade 7 must agree to finish the three-year program.) This year the meeting was organized completely by the committee of elders who oversee the school and by our teacher Clara Luz, who was the first woman from Huixoc to graduate from high school.

A highlight of this recent trip was a 14-hour trek across northern Guatemala to attend the graduation of our second teacher, Erick, from the Talita Kumi teacher training institute in San Pedro Carchá. We had a productive planning meeting with the institute's director and have developed a good

working relationship with her. She agreed to visit Clara Luz and Erick in Huixoc this spring and again in August to offer support and direction. Clara Luz has completed additional instruction and is now qualified to train other teachers. We have also hired a linguistic and educational advisor, Daniel Lopez of the Rigoberta Menchú Institute (named for the Mayan social activist and winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize.)

Plans for this year include enrolling the next class of students and training another qualified teacher; three candidates have already expressed interest in becoming the school's third teacher in 2008. We are working to promote closer relationships among parents, teachers and community advisors of the school. We also are exploring additional ways to include elements of the rich Mayan cultural heritage in our school curriculum.

Looking ahead ...

While project-sponsored trips to Guatemala are important benchmarks of progress, much work goes on between these visits. Ongoing activities include the collection of computers, school and clinic supplies and medications, and planning for future success of the project. Our long-term goal is to make the project self-sustaining by providing new sources of jobs in the community and an independent income for the school. Possibilities include chicken farming, coffee processing, or the planting of shade trees in coffee fields for production of lumber and for food crops like avocado and macadamia nuts. As well, purchase of land will be essential to accommodate a third classroom, library and computer room.

Organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) support similar initiatives in Central America, and I have met with the British Columbia representative for CIDA to discuss funding opportunities. Granting agencies require registration of the Health and Education Project as a charitable society, and

we have begun this process. Meanwhile, I am grateful to the West Point Grey United Church for its continued assistance in processing donations and donor receipts.

Thank you!



Erick is the second teacher trained and hired for the Huixoc school. The new junior high program will enable children like his young brother to attend school in their home village through Grade 9.

Dr. Coburn as NGO volunteer with a surgical patient, whose cleft lip has been repaired, and his family.



Dr. Coburn examines a patient in the Huixoc clinic.



Dr. Coburn and Mayan friend, Elena, in Huixoc.

Coming Events

Music from North to South

This benefit concert will feature music for clarinet, flute, cello, oboe and piano. The program includes works by Haydn, Bartók and others, and the premiere performance of a Sonata for Piano and Clarinet by Jean Ethridge, with the composer in attendance.

Admission by donation.

West Point Grey United Church
4595 West 8th Avenue, Vancouver
Sunday, April 22, 2007
7.30 p.m.

3rd Annual Gourmet Spring Buffet

The event will again include elegant food and wines by Trafalgar's Bistro, a silent auction, entertainment and a presentation on the Mayan Health and Education Project. Date and location to be announced.



Stephen Greenham and Lorne Tyczenski, owners of Trafalgar's Bistro, catered the 2006 Gourmet Spring Buffet at the Vancouver home of Barbara Small and Leonard Schein. The event raised sufficient funds to support the Huixoc school for the year.

The Mayan Health and Education Project is an independent project initiated in 2001 by Dr. Ellen Coburn, a family physician practicing in Vancouver, Canada, in collaboration with Vancouver's Mayan community. The project supports medical aid trips to Guatemala and operation of a junior high school in Huixoc, a Mayan village in the mountain highlands near the Mexican border. The project is funded entirely by tax-deductible donations, and by contributions of equipment, supplies and services.

I want to support a better life for the Mayan people of Guatemala. I am enclosing:

- a cheque to support a child for one year of school. (\$500)
- a donation of \$ _____ (designate any amount) for the project's health and education initiatives.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

- Please send me a tax receipt.

For more information about the project or coming events, please contact:

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Tax-deductible financial donations may be made c/o:
Mayan Project/ West Point Grey United Church
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