

2019 Fall Update -- Guatemala Friends Scholarship Program – PROGRESA

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The Progresas Mural

This year we have our first scholarship student who is studying art; in a very short time he has become a much valued member of our Progresas family. When we first spoke to him about the options for his community service he suggested that he would like to create a mural for the program and after much discussion it was decided that he would create a mural on the entrance wall to the office. We asked that the mural reflect our Quaker values/testimonies and also the Mayan culture of our students. In response Juan Jose created a design which we loved and with the help of 8 other students the mural was painted over the course of two months.

The following is a shortened version of an interview Yesenia held with Juan Jose which took place when the mural was finished. Even if you don't speak Spanish we recommend you check out this link to our Youtube page so you can meet our artist in person and hear his impressive responses as well as listen to the entire interview and see his mural in color. <https://youtu.be/y1tyDN-MvqQ>

Why don't you start by telling us a little about yourself and how this mural came to be.

My name is Juan Jose Guillen; I am 23 years old and currently in the 10th semester of my studies for the Licenciatura in art. I am from the municipality of San Rafael pie de la Cuesta located close to the coast of San Marcos. It was in this exact spot where I had my first physical contact with the program and thus because I believe art is a very powerful means of communication I thought it would be incredible to have a mural at the entrance to this organization which has been helping me this year.

Given the nature of the space available for the mural I thought it would be a good idea to divide it in sections representing the values of the organization using colors and symbols for each of them. The mural is

divided into 7 sections. The first three represent the values of peace, equality and sustainability. The center section symbolically represents Progresas and the last three parts represent the values of community, simplicity and integrity. In the center section the girl in the middle represents a scholarship student and the figure on her left represents her father or family while on her right is a Quaker who is bringing books and education. The banner in front of them is the Progresas program with its long arms encompassing them all.



Juan José, our artist

What has it been like for you to be a student of Progresa this year? Has the experience helped you to grow?

For me being in Progresa has meant more than just receiving money; it has been getting to know an entire community which has supported me and made me feel safe and comfortable. But one of the things I hold most deeply in my heart about Progresa is the sense of mutual help which does not necessarily involve money. I believe there is a palpable community between myself, my fellow students, and those who facilitate Progresa. I believe that in part creating the mural was so important to me because it is a way of returning to the project and the donors some of the feelings my fellow students and I have. I believe that behind every financial stipend is the opportunity to continue dreaming, continue believing, and continue advancing, not only academically but with our families and in becoming the people we were meant to be.

I want to thank all of our donors because, although I have never met most of you face to face, I feel your love and support every time I meet you and every time my fellow students tell how the program has change their lives.

Miguel’s Training

Last year a Quaker member of our board made a donation which was earmarked for staff training and development. After studying various options, I decided to apply for acceptance to a course offered to leaders working in the field of development in Guatemala. The course which was sponsored by the organization “Asociación para el Liderazgo de Guatemala”, met once a month on Friday and Saturday over a 6 month period. From the very first session I was impressed by the organization’s educational approach and the way they effectively combined techniques and administrative tools with the practice of a high level of human values. One of their central slogans is “We lead from within” which is to say that a good leader is someone who has adequate skills and tools but most importantly is someone who does their work with heart, passion and values.

Among the principle lessons I learned was an increased awareness of the different types of leadership, and approaches to strategic planning, time management, leading groups, conflict resolution and other social technologies. The course also provided the opportunity to meet other leaders and learn about other organizations working in a variety of development areas. Each month we were given a homework assignment which involved applying one of the lessons to our own organization and

returning with a report of how we were or were not applying them. These reports were shared with other students in small groups.

One of the learning modules I found very useful was called “Social Technologies”. This included techniques for working with groups developed by workers in fields such as Conflict Resolution and Restorative Justice. I have already used several of them in working with our student groups. For example, “World Café” is a tool for getting group members to volunteer new ideas. “Restorative Circles” helps each individual to express his or her opinion and “Points of You” is a technology which teaches group members to become aware of their feelings as well as their thoughts. I have also used Zoom to hold virtual meetings with our students and with the board.

In summary, it was a course which enriched and renewed my leadership abilities while at the same time providing a wide variety of leadership tools to improve our program.



Students during one of the workshops led by Miguel

What do our students think about the work our program does for them?

Adilene Analí Merida Gonzalez,
first year Animal Husbandry



No one chooses his/her circumstances or reality. In Guatemala the majority of people are drowning in material, emotional and spiritual poverty. PROGRESA is a light in this world because it illuminates the path through this struggle for those of us who want to get out from under the weight of such challenging adversities. Besides lacking funds, the greatest challenge for me, continuously, is being far away from my daughter. But I prefer to overcome the struggle and demonstrate that one can better oneself, rather than to stand back, arms folded in defeat.

PROGRESA and my daughter are my inspiration to go on. As I encounter each obstacle in my path, I remember the support, not only the economic assistance, but

also the moral support that they make available to me. I know that there are people who believe in me which helps me recover my self-confidence whenever I lose touch with it. Thank you PROGRESA because you are also my family, the ones who help me by listening to me when I have needed that. And thank you for all of the support made available to me.

Glenda Esmeralda Patzan Vásquez, first year, pre-primary school education



PROGRESA's support has been very important for me. It has already helped me this year, not only financially, but also emotionally through its workshops. This year I had different obstacles and difficulties, but that does not mean I abandoned my dreams or my goals. At PROGRESA they have shown me that I can achieve what

I want. Even in the interview process they encourage us and increase our degree of motivation. They support us with words that motivate us to go forward.

The workshops have been a big help. They support us emotionally and they offer us knowledge and understanding. Besides that, they give us a chance to express our own ideas and that helps us to get along and cope better in society.

I thank God because God has helped you, the donors, so that you may offer us these opportunities. Thanks to PROGRESA I have met many people who with time are becoming more than friends. So from the moment of arriving at PROGRESA, one feels as if he or she is at home, sharing with another family.

Alba Azucena Chitic Guarcas, second year, pre-primary school education



I have had many financial obstacles to education. There are many learning requirements and we use many of materials to accomplish them.

Sometimes I did not have the possibility for purchasing everything necessary and that affected my grades. I have also had some family problems and at times I say to myself, "I can't go on. I give up and I won't continue my studies."

Nevertheless, I overcame every obstacle I encountered in my studies with the help I was receiving from PROGRESA. Sometimes I had no money for my assignments, yet I received my scholarship just in time and with that I could buy those necessary supplies. PROGRESA always encourages me in my studies, even though there have been problems going forward. They motivate me to continue studying and they help me to get good grades which has helped me to not give up.

Additionally, PROGRESA has created workshops that cover various topics. During these I've learned new things which are very important and have served me in one way or another. In summary, it seems to me PROGRESA does a very good job and treats students in the program very well.

Jhony Estuardo Otzoy SajBochol,
third year, Law School



PROGRESA is like a father and mother to us students. She is a friend that gives us support, providing economic, psychological, emotional, professional and medical assistance and help. It shares workshops, conferences and trainings with us. It makes us feel like family.

The scholarship lets us dedicate ourselves to our studies. We can focus and make progress. In Guatemala opportunities to get ahead are scarce, almost non-existent. According to the attorney for the Office of Human Rights in Guatemala, the average monthly income for a Guatemalan citizen is Q 1798.00 (approximately US \$ 240). And according to Guatemala's National Institute for Statistics, the minimal basic cost of living is Q 3585.33 (approx. US \$ 490). That's a major disparity! Of the entire population only 2 % reach university level studies. At PROGRESA we form

friendships with people from different parts of Guatemala who share their experiences and we share ours. My experience at PROGRESA is transcendental.

News of our graduates

Maria Aracely Vasquez Puac studied with us in 2016 and 2017. We helped her to complete the technical level of professional nursing at the National nursing school in Quetzaltenango. After leaving Progresa she continued her studies for the licenciatura supporting herself with part time nursing jobs but this year she had to drop her studies because she got a full-time job using her nursing skills.



She is now working for "Pies de Occidente", a Guatemalan organization which is dedicated to the promotion, investigation, and education in health in the western part of Guatemala. Aracely is a field technician for the project "Maternal and Neonatal Health" which has as its principle goal the

reduction of maternal and neonatal deaths in Momostenango, Totonicapán. Among her functions is the training of women who are pregnant and those who are in their fertile years regarding basic care before, during and after pregnancy. She also provides training to the local mid-wives and to personnel in the “puestos de salud”, small health centers. One of her greatest challenges is to increase the awareness of this issue among community authorities in the local aldeas and housing areas. She says *“Many of the authorities aren’t even aware of the serious problem we have of maternal deaths in Totonicapán. The ingrained machismo doesn’t permit women to make decisions about their own bodies.”*

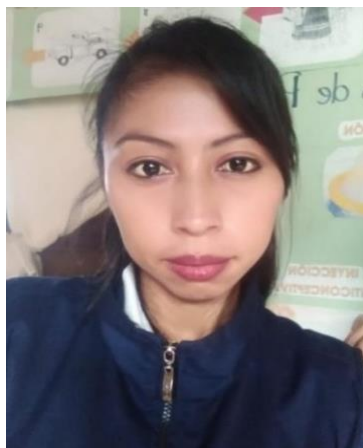
Little by little Aracely has been opening doors to new ways of thinking in the community which has saved various lives because people were aware of the danger signs for several pregnant women. There is a lot to do but she is committed to the project and to improving the health of women and children.

Leivi Romelia Caal Chub was helped by Progresá in 2016 during her third year of achieving the technical level of professional nursing at the national nursing school of Cobán. Since finishing the technical level she has worked at several nursing jobs including at the Centro de Atención Primaria de Carcha, Alta Verapaz.

Now she is working for a community program financed by UNICEF. The program is focused on detecting urgent cases of chronic infantile malnutrition in the area of Panzós, Alta Verapaz. Malnutrition in children less than 5 years old is alarmingly high in the rural areas of Guatemala.

Leivi’s work involves traveling to the communities which are furthest from Panzós and detecting possible cases of malnutrition and then referring them to the closest health center. She reports that *“in many communities there is not even a nurse in the health centers and the few employees that they have are not sufficient to visit with the families. When I find a child suffering from malnutrition my job is to report it and follow his or her case. Many mothers don’t understand the long-term consequences of malnutrition in their children”* -Leivi Caal-

Leivi is in the final phase of her supervised practicum which is required for obtaining the title of Graduate Professional Nurse.



Yesika María Karina Tucubal Sanahi is originally from Comalapa, Chimaltenango. She was in the program from 2014 until 2016 when she studied at the technical level for a degree in bilingual education. She also worked for Progresá for two years as an administrative assistant. Now she is finalizing her work for the Licenciatura in Bilingual Education.



Yesika currently works for the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, specifically working with the Kaqchikel linguistic community. The object of ALMG is the rescue and revitalization of the Maya languages and culture. Yesika’s work consists of sensitizing and training community members regarding the importance of revitalizing and using the Kaqchikel language.



Our program has supported over 1300 Guatemalans since 1973.

Paulina Ramirez Ahilon is originally from the Primavera Community del Ixcán, Quiché. She was in the program from 2016 to 2018 studying for the degree of Specialist in Administration. She always talked about her desire to help her community and the needs that she saw in the community. At the end of 2018 she participated in the community elections and was elected along with 4 others. This year she is part of the Coordinating Council of Primavera del Ixcán (CCPI). Among her principle duties is the detection of community needs and the formation of projects to meet such needs. One of the most important successes she and her fellow council members have had is the improvement of the Primary School buildings.

Primavera del Ixcán is a small community in which the lands and goods are owned and administered communally.

According to Paulina it is often in danger because of the richness of the land they own. Paulina told us that they are constantly in a fight with mineral and palm oil companies that have tried to take over nearby community lands. *“We as authorities of the community must be constantly vigilant. They have tried to frighten us but we have resisted. Being part of a CCPI requires work every day. I am happy to be helping my community.”* –Paulina.



Now Paulina has plans to look for paid employment in the next year. She wants to help her children and offer them better opportunities in life.

The Teaching English Workshop 2020

The January 2020 workshop is entirely filled. We will have the biggest group ever and are no longer accepting applications. The good news for some of you is that we have decided to hold the next workshop in early December of 2020 rather than in January 2021. The workshop will meet for 7 days and 8 nights starting December 1st. and finish on December 9th. Priority will be given to applications which are received by October 1st of 2020, as long as we haven't filled it out before.



Our enthusiastic teachers from our last TE Workshop, Jan 2019

Many, many thanks to our faithful donors for making all this rewarding work possible!

Please support our efforts to provide educational opportunities to Guatemalans. Make your donations to: **Redwood Forest Friends Meeting** and mail it to:
 Redwood Forest Friends Meeting
 Attn: Guatemala Scholarship Program
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