

December 2017 Update

Fruits we are harvesting after 44 years of service

From the beginning, all of us who have worked in this program have experienced the satisfaction of seeing the joy of many Guatemalans when they received a university degree or graduated from high school. These were accomplishments that had seemed like impossibilities for them before their participation in and assistance from Progresa. We have seen how several of our former graduates have become the first doctors, lawyers or teachers in their communities making valuable services accessible for the first time. With great joy, we have watched many graduates become true leaders of their communities, promoting development projects and motivating others to get ahead.

In addition to the above contributions to Guatemala, I want to focus now on a very important success for Progresa in recent years. That success is the participation and contributions of our graduates to our program.

Workshops for students.

This year Progresa offered six workshops for our current scholarship students. The workshop topics were gender equality and analysis of politics in Guatemala. Our graduates presenting the workshops were: Karina Sic, Social Worker; Angelico Otzoy and David Villatoro, Attorneys; and Alejandro Chan, Political Scientist. We plan to

continue offering these workshops and have our graduates as presenters whenever possible.

Annual student conferences

In the last three years, there has been participation of current scholarship students and our graduates in the presentations at our annual student conferences. In 2017, the central theme was migration. One of our medical students gave a talk about how migration affects the health of families and communities. In 2016, the main speaker was Hector Canto, current deputy minister of education and a former scholarship recipient. His theme was the current state of education in Guatemala and its challenges. Additionally, there was a first aid workshop given by Victor Yacon, another medical student.

In 2015, two of our former students offered workshops, one on motivation and leadership and the other on entrepreneurship.



David Villatoro, lawyer.



Karina Sic, social worker.

Administrative advances and training

A psychologist and Progresa graduate reviewed the tools for Progresa's student selection process recently. She made recommendations for improving applicant interviews and provided training for the Progresa office team. Last year, a Social Work graduate did an institutional evaluation to determine Progresa's strengths and weaknesses. From this evaluation came proposals for improvements. In 2015, one of our engineer graduates planned and directed the remodeling of the Parramos office. Since 2008, the legal work for Progresa has been provided by two of our attorney graduates. It should also be mentioned that all but one of the employees for Progresa has been a Progresa student or graduate.

This month we will have our first meeting with new graduates and former graduates. Our goal is to strengthen the sense of belonging and support to those who have been beneficiaries of the program and to form an Advisory Team. We have seen how talented, motivated and capable our graduates are. We think that the ideas and support from them will be essential in our on-going evaluation and improvement of services. We also hope that in this collaboration Progresa will prove help and support to our graduates as well.

Finally, a profound thanks to all donors and F/friends who have worked so diligently and faithfully to support Progresa and to make all these accomplishments possible.



Victor Yacon, graduated as a doctor last October

Students needing help

Jose Luis Ramiro Tay Morales is not one of our typical students. He was 50 years old when he first became a PROGRESA scholarship student in January 2017. With the help of another organization he had already



completed 2 ½ years studying social work in a weekend program at the Mariano Galvez University in Chimaltenango. As a child Jose Luis was not able to finish primary school. The oldest of 7 children he needed to help his father in the fields. Over the years he has continued to work as a subsistence farmer supporting his mother after his father passed away and his siblings married and started their own families. He married very late and now has two children, a 5 year old son and a daughter who is less than a year.

Jose Luis has always been a community activist working with others since 1985 to help bring electricity and potable water to his community as well as constructing a school and improving the roads. It was these activities that led him to realize how important education was in bringing about community development and social change. He thus began the long road of educating himself.

During his first two years at university he struggled to pass which is not surprising since most of his previous academic work was in special schools for "mature students". These schools play an important role but they are not noted for the quality of their education. His high school degree, for example, consisted of one year of weekend study. Despite these limitations we were impressed with his drive and his clear motivation to help his community. In selecting Jose Luis we felt we were not so much developing a community leader as helping an already formed leader to blossom into his full potential. So far it looks like our bet is

paying off. During the first semester of 2017 he achieved an amazing average of 82. Even more surprising to me is that his writing skills rank within the top 20% of our students.

For his first community service project he gave a series of talks to members of the local Cocode (a citizen organization) about the negative effects of plastic contamination. Each lecture was followed by a community clean-up day. According to the secretary of the local Cocode he organized the members in a drive which provided over 750 man, woman and child hours of clean-up and left everyone more aware of the problem. In his final report Jose Luis notes that when neighbors from other villages observed the project they ask if the municipality was funding it. They were told “no” it is a community effort and you could organize the same thing in your community.

This year we agreed to pay for only his university fees and half of his bus transportation, but this has not been enough. Twice he has come to us asking for small additional loans. We have granted them but don't want to saddle him with a large debt which he would have trouble repaying. We hope to find a donor or donors who could provide him with \$150 a month or \$1500 for the entire school year. This should cover almost all of his education expenses and allow him to use his farming income to support his family.

Hermelinda Concepcion

Miguel Nicolas wants to work with special needs students. There were no such programs where she grew up in a small aldea of Santa Eulalia located 87 kilometers from the city of Huehuetenango. She



learned about special education while she was attending Socorro, a boarding school for Indigenas girls located in Antigua. (Those of you who have participated in the Teaching English program may remember this is the school run by the sisters of

Belen) She wanted to offer programs for special needs students in her own municipio and thought that the best way to begin was to get a degree in special education. She turned to the internet to learn more but the only program she found for Persons with Special Needs was offered at the University Del Valle located in Guatemala city. This didn't stop Hermelinda; she went to Guatemala City and got a job as a domestic working for several years before she saved enough money to begin her university classes.

All went well in the first semester and she got pretty good grades but in the second semester her father became seriously ill and she was forced to withdraw from her classes and return home to help take care of him. Sadly he did not live for long but it was long enough for the family to acquire numerous medical debts. For the next two years everyone had to work in order to pay off the family debts. It was not until July of 2017 that Herelinda was able to return to school to finish her second semester.

We were somewhat hesitant to accept her as a Progreso student because Del Valle is one of the most expensive schools in Guatemala but Hermelinda's determination was stronger than ever. By this time she was involved in starting a new foundation in Santa Eulalia which was actively working to meet the needs of differently abled children and adults. You can find them on Facebook and the pictures make it clear that they are actively providing much needed services. We are still waiting for her official grades but Hermelinda reports she did OK in her first semester back. This year we covered only her tuition and monthly university fees which came to about \$600 for the semester but we could see that she was struggling financially. If she passes all her classes we would like to be able to offer her more financial support next year. Is there anyone out there who is able to pay close to \$2000 to support Hermelinda for the year? Or anyone who would like to partially sponsor her?

Community service projects in 2017

Marta Reina Sanic has just completed her 6th semester of middle school teaching. This year she decided to do her community service working with the Asociacion Puente which helps women in rural communities with developing products and also improving their health. She observed that the association did not have enough people working in their prevention program so she volunteered to help with the mothers of children who showed signs of malnutrition.



Marta during one of her malnutrition prevention talks

According to a study done by the association, out of 160 children under the age of 3, in Marta's aldea of Chimixaya and the neighboring aldea of Xequchelaj, 47% of the children suffered from moderate chronic malnutrition, 27% suffered from severe chronic malnutrition and 3 children suffered from extremely grave malnutrition. Marta's work consisted in facilitating various talks about nutrition and the causes of malnutrition to two groups of approximately 25 women each in the two different aldeas covered in the study. Her talks addressed such topics as the definition of malnutrition, the causes of malnutrition, the negative effects of malnutrition, the basic food groups, and the preparation of nutritious meals using locally available products. An example was the preparation of a nutritious drink using local herbs and Incaparina which is a highly nutrition product developed in Guatemala and sold at a very low cost. According to Marta one of the greatest successes of her project was that the women could

understand the topics and ask questions as the workshops were entirely in Kaqchikel.

Maria Isabel Cabrera Sales is in her 5th year of studying for her bachelor's degree in teaching, with a specialization in language and communication. She decided to do her community service project in the primary school in her home community of El Xab. The school has only one teacher to work with all six grades, so the students were not getting enough instruction in reading and writing. Isabel instituted a program called "Guatemala Needs to Improve Reading and Writing". She worked with 43 children in the 3rd through the 6th grades, applying the things she has learned in her studies to motivate the children to improve their reading and writing skills. In order to make reading more attractive to her students she also created a reading corner in the classroom. Her service project was an important support for the school and the children.



Group of children reading during Isabel's class.

Many, many thanks to all our donors and collaborators for making all this possible. You can help us to continue this rewarding work by donating to our program. All donations are tax deductible! Checks are made out to: **Redwood Forest Friends**

Meeting and are mailed to:

Redwood Forest Friends Meeting

Attn: Guatemala Scholarship Program

P.O. Box 1831, Santa Rosa CA 95402

You can also help us by participating in our tours to Guatemala. Visit our website for more information:

www.guatemalfriends.org