

To all of our long-time donors:

THANK YOU!



Our youth leaders performing a skit at the 2008 Nimacabaj Health Fair

YOU HAVE HELPED GET US THIS FAR...

We are extremely grateful for all the support our long-term donors have given us over the past few years! It is with your support that we have been able to provide needed health services in the villages around Rabinal, as well as help make a sustainable impact on the community by investing in the education of its young leaders.

We wanted to thank all of our donors who have been faithfully supporting our program since it began in 2008. Currently our organization is undergoing some changes, bringing with it exciting opportunities. Before introducing some of these changes, we wanted to let you all hear first-hand how your support has effected the lives of some of our original scholarship students.

This summer, the team of Voces y Manos volunteers visited the families of the original group of scholarship students. We already knew we had unique group of young leaders in the program- but we found a level of dedication and sacrifice from entire families that left us humbled. These students are focused on their goals to further their education, and are willing

to do whatever it takes to see that dream accomplished.

Their stories deeply impacted us and the way we are furthering our own work. After all the dedication our donors have given to support these incredible students, we knew we had to share their stories with you too.

The take-away message from this is clear:

Your donations have made a tangible impact in the lives of these students.

Thank you for everything you have already given! We and our scholarship students are truly grateful, especially understanding the tough economic times many of you have personally faced. We'll keep you posted as our new opportunities develop- and we look forward to continuing to partner with you!



Promoting the Achi culture

Students from our Rabinal partner school, Fundacion Nueva Esperanza, dressed for the traditional Baile de Achi.

What Education Means to the Families of Our Students, and to Us

By Michael Bakal, Co-founder of Voces y Manos, and summer volunteer

The 5 weeks we spent living with the families of our scholarship recipients in Rabinal were truly life-changing. Our host families welcomed us into their lives and culture with generosity, hospitality and kindness. Homestays allowed us to develop close relationships with the youth, and deep respect for them and their families.

Patricia, Silvia and Adelís--our original group of scholarships recipients--are now completing their second year of training to become nursery school teachers at the prestigious Colegio Tetzulutlán in Salamá, Baja Verapaz.

One Thursday afternoon, Patricia invited all the volunteers over to her house to show us several of her school projects. The quality of her work--an assortment of games, posters and toys designed to help pre-school children learn the alphabet--was impressive, yet her grades were only mediocre.

"Our teachers say we are training to be professionals, and we must turn in work done by computer," Patricia explained, "They take off points every time we turn in work done by hand." Patricia's family has no computer. She has explained her predicament to her teachers, but they accept no "excuses."

Although we were able to arrange time for students to have computer access at Fundación Nueva Esperanza, it was difficult to overcome bitterness toward a school that could be so indifferent to the needs of students living in poverty.

Shortly after arriving at Patricia's house, Adelís and her mother, Doña Fermina, arrived. Doña Fermina is a joyful woman who works hard each day to provide for her family. But her employment selling soap provides little income, and she is forced into difficult decisions: Should she spend money on food, or on Adelís' busfare? "Sometimes, when Adelís asks for bread, I get upset," Doña Fermina explains. "I tell her, 'We don't have money for bread, eat tortillas.'"

Adelís discusses the many obstacles she faces, but in the same breath articulates a sentiment that the three girls share: they have made it this far--they only have one year to go until they graduate--they will not give up.

The third member of the trio is Silvia Uscap, whose participation in the scholarship program has been most precarious of all. Silvia's mother explains that the conditions of extreme poverty her family endures were not always so.

Prior to 1982, the Uscap family lived in a community along the banks of the Rio Negro. They supported themselves by growing maize and selling petates--bedding made of palm branches. Then came news of the government's plans to build a hydroelectric dam on the Rio Negro and force the entire community to relocate. Community members who refused to give up their land were met with brutal military repression.

Many of Silvia's uncles, aunts and cousins lost their lives in the massacre that killed over 5,000 innocent people. Those who survived--including Silvia's parents--were relocated to the crowded settlement of Pacux, whose densely populated streets constrict attempts by community members to re-establish their lives.

From the mid 1980s to the present, the women in Silvia's family have lived in Pacux and earned a living shelling pumpkin seeds through a municipal-sponsored program that pays 2 Quetzales, or 25 US cents, per day.

The dream of education, in the face of such dire necessity, appeared out of reach, but thanks to the support of Fundación Nueva Esperanza, Silvia successfully graduated from the 9th grade in 2008. Now halfway done with professional school, Silvia's passion for education is stronger than ever, but her family's economic tribulations have worsened.



Adelís Mendoza, one of the 2008 Scholarship students

The daily busfare of 6 quetzales to arrive and return from school proved an almost insurmountable obstacle for the Uscap family, and Silvia was nearly forced to drop out of school.

Silvia has now taken on the near impossible: waking up at 1:00 AM many mornings to make tortillas until 6:00AM, when she finishes homework and leaves for school. The money she earns is just enough to pay for her bus fare to go to school for one day. For one more day . . .

In the Mayan cosmivision, all life is interrelated, and humankind is viewed as one extended family. In such a context, it becomes quite easy to embrace the sentiment Martin Luther King Jr. expressed at the climax of the civil rights movement when he stated:

"We are caught in inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

We know that our lives are entwined with those of the families who, in five short weeks, became our students, our teachers, our coworkers, and our friends. We share in their profound hope that education will bring about the transformation of self, family and community for which they strive each day.

Check out our new Scholarship Support Guide to find out more about how to continue to support our scholarship students! All of this information is also available on our website, www.vocesymanos.org