

Spotlight: Understanding the Impacts of Attachment & Trauma

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Our Guatemala

*Explore the Work of
Cooperative for Education
in Changing the Lives
of Guatemalan Children*

Attachment & Trauma

**Understanding the Impacts
of a Child's Early Beginnings,
Preparing Them for the Future**

Assessment

The Whys and the Whats



Our Guatemala

Cooperative for Education Makes a Difference in Guatemala

By Kim Phagan-Hansel & Photos by Jenna Fischer



Anselma

When Anselma Monroy Ortiz was in elementary school her life forever changed. The daughter of poor Guatemalan farmers, education was never emphasized by her parents — her mother never attended school and her father only attended until third grade. But Ortiz wanted something more and, fortunately for her, others wanted something more for her as well.

Teachers in her elementary school, San Jose Pacúl, saw something special in her, so Ortiz received a scholarship from Cooperative for Education, an American non-profit that works in conjunction with Guatemalans to provide educational resources and opportunities for indigenous Mayans. Founded in 1996, CoEd has worked diligently in Guatemala's Central and Western Highlands to expand educational opportunities for children.

Now in her early 20s, Ortiz was one of the first students in Santiago Sactepequez's nearby village of Pacúl to benefit from CoEd's involvement in Guatemala.

"I didn't have a chance to start an education," Ortiz said. "They gave me the opportunity to get a scholarship to start."

Ortiz's parents couldn't afford to send her to school, so when she received the scholarship it was an opportunity to work hard to improve not only her life, but also the lives of all of her family members.

"They didn't have that expectation for me (to go to school) because they couldn't afford it," Ortiz said. "But they were believing in me and I had to show them I was able."

Ortiz set to work in middle school, commonly known as Basico in Guatemala, to prove to her parents and herself that she could succeed. Not only did she succeed in Basico, but Ortiz went on to study at Escual Oficial de Secretarial Bilingue in Mixco outside of Guatemala City with the help of CoEd. After graduating as a teacher, Ortiz worked as a computer teacher at San Jose Pacúl before finding a job in customer service for Transactel call center.

As a CoEd success story, Ortiz traveled to Ohio in October 2013 to share her story with CoEd supporters.

“That was just amazing for me,” Ortiz said. “I met many people and they were so friendly with me. It’s a really nice experience.”

While Ortiz enjoyed the opportunity to visit the United States and share her story, ultimately CoEd’s greatest impact on her life has been the opportunity it has provided to her family. Because of her education, she now earns enough to help support her family. She has also had opportunities that many of her elementary school classmates have never experienced, many of whom now have families of their own.

“It has helped me out to support my family,” Ortiz said. “It supports my needs and my family’s needs as well. It’s better — it’s a better life. CoEd has impacted my life and brought it to another level.”

Ortiz is just one success story created by the support of CoEd, which was founded by two brothers, Joe and Jeff Berninger, after they spent time in Guatemala and realized they could make a difference in the country’s future by simply bringing textbooks and training to schools and teachers.

After Jeff spent three months teaching English in Guatemalan schools, he quickly learned that textbooks were few and far between in the country.

“Ninety percent of schools in Guatemala don’t have books,” Joe said. “Fifty percent of the population cannot read or write and 80 percent live in poverty. You see the tremendous

As an educator for the past 20 years and faculty of Antioch University Midwest, I know the impact a solid foundation in reading can make and continuing education is life-changing. As the mother of three children, it was not until I came to better understand the lack of basic infrastructure in the educational system in Guatemala that I realized our son, Marty Jose, adopted from Guatemala at 13 months old, not only gained a family, but he gained access to an education, healthcare and a future filled with possibilities only limited by his goals and aspirations.

This reality does not exist for most children in Guatemala and our family felt the calling to be a part of that change. So how did we do it? We went searching for great organizations already impacting the educational system in Guatemala and little did we know we would find one in our backyard in Cincinnati! Ten years later, I am honored to strongly support the work of Cooperative for Education primarily through exposure of the organization to adoptive families looking to connect to effective NGO’s changing the outcome of educational opportunities for children in Guatemala. Today, I also serve as giving back coordinator for Cincinnati Friends Through Guatemalan Adoption, and her son Marty Jose It was an honor to share the work of CoEd with Adoption Today Editor Kim Hansel in April and to know this experience will continue to bring greater exposure to an organization breaking the cycle of poverty one child at a time through education in a country forever connected to our family...our Guatemala. — Sonya Fultz



Sonya & Marty

need there.”

In the school where he was teaching, Jeff first found contributors to donate textbooks and then came up with a plan to have students contribute about \$1 a month that would build a fund to replace books as they became worn and outdated. As other schools began to learn about the program Jeff established, other nearby schools expressed interest in participating.

From its beginnings 18 years ago, CoEd has expanded its programs to include several other educational elements. The original Textbook Program has provided more than 116,000 textbooks to Guatemala with about 160 schools in Guatemala participating in the program. From there CoEd has expanded, creating Computer Centers in 2001. Today, there are 39 Computer Centers in Basicos

where more than 11,000 students have the opportunity to learn about computers. Each week students receive 60-120 minutes of computer instruction and contribute about \$2.50 a month to create a computer sustainability fund.

“Without the sustainability plan, you have what we call the ‘dump and go’ development,” Joe said. “Without a sustainability plan, all of that will break down and become obsolete over time.”

Most recently launched, the Culture of Reading Program provides instruction to teachers on how to read to students. The program is derived from the Concentrated Language Encounter methodology that has been developed specifically by literacy experts for developing countries. A 2012 study of CoEd’s use of



CORP shows students have had a 50 percent increase in reading skills, including vocabulary, speed and comprehension.

“Over the course of two years, we’re able to, by 180 degrees, change their teaching methods,” Joe said.

With statistics that only 18 percent of Guatemalan students graduate from high school, success stories like Ancelma’s are rare. CoEd provides scholarships to about 150 students a year. Joe said he hopes to bump that to 300 next year and reach 1,000 in the next five years. Because indigenous Mayan people are discriminated against and girls are viewed as second class citizens, CoEd focuses on selecting indigenous girls to receive the scholarships. So far 814 students have received a one-year scholarship and about 500 scholarship students have graduated from high school.

“Our scholarship program is one of the most sustainable programs we offer because it creates one-on-one relationship with the donors,” Joe said. “It’s a six-year relationship.”

Not only do students receive a scholarship, but they also participate in community service and career exploration. Because there are often multiple reasons children do not continue their education, a social worker connects with

the children and their families to build relationships and educate all members of the family on the importance of education.

Like Ancelma, CoEd’s scholarship program has been a success. To date, 96 percent of students who complete middle school with a CoEd Scholarship go on to graduate from high school.

“We follow the kids,” Joe said. “We know anybody in Guatemala with a 12th grade education will stay above the poverty line.”

CoEd is in the process of developing a long-term study that will track the kids who have gone through the program, so there is a better understanding of the scholarship program’s long-term benefits. Joe said he remembers Ancelma when she was in sixth grade and her determination to succeed in the program.

“Nine years later, she makes four times as much as her dad,” Joe said. “With the scholarship program you see the greatest amount of change because those kids have the benefit of all of our programs. They are living, breathing, talking versions of our mission statement.”

Now, CoEd is in the process of developing a best practices guide for other organizations to take CoEd’s ideas and implement them in

other countries and locations.

“We don’t want to have a pins on the map strategy,” Joe said. “If you’re working on supporting education, you have to understand how a country’s education system operates. We want to get really, really good at what we’re doing in Guatemala.”

Today CoEd has 10 employees in the United States, including Joe and Jeff. Plus they have an additional 25 employees in Guatemala. Each year they add textbooks in five to seven schools and computers in one to two schools. They also add a cluster of eight schools to the CORP program annually and 70 children to the scholarship program.

Ortiz finds it difficult to put into words the impact the support of CoEd has had on her life. But she understands the gift she has been given has forever changed her life and given her opportunities she could only dream about previously.

“If it weren’t for people like them, none of this would have been possible for me,” Ortiz said. “Their generosity is so nice. Someday I will do something for them.”

For more information on Cooperative for Education, visit <http://www.coeduc.org>.

A Dedication to Education

Only one girl attended school when Juan Jose Caxaj Yos started teaching at Instituto Nacional por Cooperativo Santiago Sac more than 25 years ago. In Guatemala's male-dominated society, girls were not encouraged or expected to get an education.

"The man was going to work so that's why education was more important — the woman would just be at home," Yos said. "Typically an indigenous girl does not participate in school."

When Cooperative for Education started working at Instituto Nacional por Cooperativo Santiago Sac about 11 years ago that all began to change. Now the principal at the Santiago Basico, or middle school, Yos said 52 percent of the student population is girls and 48 percent boys.

"The books have allowed the girls to have an education as well and that's most important," Yos said. "It has motivated girls to go to school. They want to be there."

Not only has CoEd brought books to the school, but a whole new way of looking at education for teachers and parents alike. In an extremely impoverished area of the country, it was incredibly difficult for parents to find the money to purchase books for their children or understand the importance of education.

When he first started teaching, Yos had to make copies of his book to share with his students. Even though teaching was a struggle, Yos had some misgivings when Cooperative for Education first came to the school wanting to start its program.

"I wasn't OK with the program at the beginning," Yos said. "I had a fear the people wouldn't respond to the help."

But it wasn't long before Yos began to see the benefits, not only for his students, but for himself as well.

"It made everything easy for me," Yos said. "I could make progress. It's faster teaching."

The differences CoEd brought to the school have completely changed the school and the way it operates, Yos said. From students having more textbooks to teachers having more training, CoEd has impacted the way students learn every day.

"When CoEd arrived at the school everything did a 180," Yos said. "It changed everything."

For the parents, there was no longer a struggle to purchase books. For students, owning books brought new responsibilities. With the addition of books, many students also took the opportunity to take their



Juan Jose Caxaj Yos

books home and share them with their families, helping many of the older generation learn to read.

"Having the book, there's a lot of responsibility to have a book," Yos said. "Everyone gets to read at home."

Of course many times students get out of their experience what they put into it. While some connect with school and all that an education has to offer, others unfortunately do not always appreciate the opportunities provided through CoEd, Yos said.

"It gives opportunity to everyone, but it depends on the student if they take advantage of the opportunity," Yos said. "We know the work we are doing for the students has value."

Today, the school has 390 students in grades seven, eight and nine. For Yos, the lives of each of those students and so many others have been positively impacted by the work of CoEd.

A shining success story for Yos is that of Anselma Monroy Ortiz, a young Guatemala girl who received a scholarship to attend Instituto Nacional por Cooperativo Santiago Sac.

"The proof of the success is Anselma," Yos said. "When Anselma came to school, she came from a small town that didn't have much. The influence at home... I think someone was telling her to quit. When she noticed the difference it {education} made in her life, she started to participate in everything."

Today, Anselma's life is drastically different than what it would have been had she not attended school. Fluent in English, Anselma works at a call center and is able to support her extended family, as well as herself, something Yos said he hopes all of his students will achieve.

"I see her having a job, traveling... I bless her," Yos said. "Education does change kids' lives. They have a bright future with education."

A woman in a pink shirt is reading a newspaper titled "IMPACTO" in a classroom. The newspaper has headlines like "USABAN NEGOCIO COMO FACHADA", "ENERGIA", and "Súbete a tus ALAS". In the background, several children are sitting at desks, some looking at books or papers. The classroom has a wooden cabinet and a window with a view of the outdoors.

Teaching the Next Generation

By Kim Phagan-Hansel

Yanira Batres loves her Guatemalan homeland, but she also wants to see things change. With a degree in education, Batres started her journey as a teacher.

"I started as a teacher and as a teacher I could only help a small group," Batres said.

Since 2010 Batres has been employed by Cooperative for Education as a Culture of Reading Program specialist. One of 32 employees working in Guatemala, Batres works one-on-one to train teachers how to read to, interact with, and better educate the children in their classrooms.

"Now I can help more kids every year," Batres said. "I want to change Guatemala — maybe not tomorrow, but maybe in 10 years."

Responsible for purchasing textbooks and other instructional materials for the 32 Culture of Reading Programs CoEd sponsors, Batres works diligently to improve the level of instruction in schools across Guatemala. Typically Batres works in at least one school every day and sometimes as many as three depending on the proximity to CoEd's main office.

"I observe classes and see how teachers need help," Batres said. "There's a lot of steps. We work two years with each teacher."

Prior to involvement with CoEd, in many cases teachers typically only had a ninth grade education. But with the introduction of CoEd programs, teachers now receive at least two

years of specialty training through the Culture of Reading Program.

One of the most basic skills Batres passes along to teachers is instructing them on how to read to a classroom full of children.

"We practice and practice the reading," Batres said.

Before CoEd began working in the schools, students didn't have access to textbooks. A typical day in the classroom was spent copying what the teacher wrote on the chalk board.

"Kids get really passive when they're copying," Batres said. "Now they understand what they read and what they write. When they participate in the classroom, they think"

Getting students to attend school has always been a challenge, but now that CoEd is bringing more textbooks and instructional materials into the schools, students are eager to see what might be introduced next.

"It's something different, so they will come to see what is new," Batres said. "It's not boring to come to school anymore. They ask for more books."

One of the biggest challenges CoEd has worked on is to improve educational outcomes of girls. On average, indigenous Guatemalan women only stay in school less than two years.

"Parents invest in boys because they take care

of the family and girls help with younger kids," Batres said.

While it's a challenge for parents to send students to elementary school, it gets even more difficult as children move into middle school, commonly known as Basicos in Guatemala. Not only are there few Basicos in the country, the expense is more than what most families can afford. The cost is typically 200 quetzales a year (about \$30 in the United States), plus the cost of materials.

For that reason, CoEd provides scholarships to about 150 indigenous Mayan students each year. More girls are typically selected to emphasize the importance of education to women. Studies conducted by CoEd show that educating girls yields a higher rate of return than any other investment in the developing world.

But participating in CoEd's schools and programs does not come without commitment and hard work.

"Schools have to commit to us because they have to go to training and we come to their classrooms to observe," Batres said.

Some schools aren't always interested in having CoEd partner to improve learning, so CoEd is selective in which schools they work with and how their programs are implemented. In addition, students who receive scholarships or participate in other CoEd programs are required to participate in community service and career exploration.

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