

# Our Work Goes On

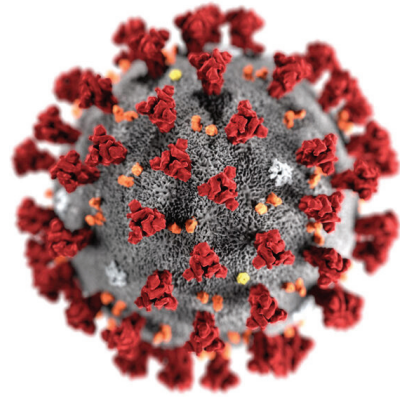
In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, Horizons continues to listen to the voices of our partners in Central America and Mexico. Like much of the world, most countries in this region are now under quarantine and schools, parks, and non-essential businesses are shuttered. Residents are allowed limited periods to be outside each day and curfews in much of the region are strictly enforced by the military.

Worrying spikes have been reported in the number of COVID-19 cases in countries like Panama and Costa Rica, which test widely. Mexico and Nicaragua, where testing is less widespread, are reporting the pandemic is under control. We are skeptical.

The situation on the ground is dynamic and concerning. At the time of writing, groceries and other supplies like soap and medicine are running low in most of the region we support. The Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa has been without water for days. Other communities have no electricity and little money to pay for supplies. The Indigenous Teribe people of Costa Rica, effectively cut off from the outside world by road closures, are readying their community to seek refuge in the mountains where they will wait out the COVID-19 pandemic with limited supplies of food they have produced themselves.

This pandemic follows five consecutive years of crop damage to a large part of the region due to drought, flooding and other

weather events, which has affected crop yields and available food supplies.



While self-isolation and social distancing have put physical distance between Horizons and our partners and curtailed

face-to-face work in the communities for now, our work is still ongoing. Thanks to regular telephone and video-conferencing calls with our partners, we are keeping abreast of the changing state of the communities we support and continuing our project planning.

Like many organizations around the world, we are working remotely to discuss how best to meet COVID-19-related needs, procure supplies, and organize deliveries. Horizons will keep up these communications over the next weeks and months and provide support where possible.

We hope we can count on your generosity and solidarity too. We need you now more than ever to help these communities meet their basic needs during this unprecedented time.

## Now Accepting Nominations for the 2020 Founders Award In recognition of Volunteerism and Leadership

When founding members Christine and David Stewart and Father Tim Coughlan created Horizons of Friendship in the 1970s, they exemplified the spirit of volunteerism, generosity, and solidarity. To commemorate our founders, Horizons created the Founders Award to celebrate and recognize the unsung volunteers and community leaders who are actively working to make the world a better place. Now is the time to nominate those unsung heroes in your community.

**Ready to nominate someone?** E-mail [info@horizons.ca](mailto:info@horizons.ca) and we'll send you the application form. Applications close on June 15th, 2020 and will be reviewed and chosen by a selection committee. The winner will receive a commemorative medal, specially crafted by renowned Northumberland artist Frances Gage and a Certificate of Recognition.

# HORIZONS OF FRIENDSHIP

# Horizons

## NEWSLETTER

Spring 2020

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO END POVERTY IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

## Bringing Back Hope to a Region in Peril



"Ten days old Asylum Seekers arrives in Tijuana, Mexico" ©Daniel Arceiz, CC-BY-FND, 2.0 creativecommons.org

Horizons' partner FOCA is working to protect the wellbeing of migrant women and their children fleeing from violence.

up to these extreme challenges.

In El Salvador, our partner ACUDESBAL (the Intercommunity Association for the Economic and Social Development of the Lower Lempa) is creating a culture of peace among youth in the country's southern coast. Young people are frequent targets of gangs, whether they

Second, by developing the skills of young female university students to defend women's rights in their future professions.

Our partner FOCA (Association for Training and Capacity Building) is working to protect the wellbeing of migrant women and children fleeing from violence. They are helping coordinate a network of civil society organizations in Mexico and Central America that focus on the safety and health of migrant women, while promoting women's rights online and through community radio in their respective countries.

"I'm scared when I go out for food," says Marisela as she comforts her seven-year-old son Diego. The young mother fled El Salvador with her child after gang members, Diego's father among them, demanded she join their ranks. Thousands of dollars and many perilous crossings later, both took refuge in a shelter close to the Mexico-US border. There, Marisela and Diego cling to the hope of escaping the violence in their lives.

Stories like Marisela's are becoming far too common in Central America and Mexico. The region, afflicted by decades of poverty and injustice, has descended into unprecedented turmoil. El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico rank among the 12 deadliest countries in the world, where gang violence rivals that found in all-out war.

This violence is worse for women and girls. El Salvador is stricken by the highest rate of gender-related killings anywhere in the world. As a result, more women and girls are fleeing from their own homes than ever before. The number of women trying to cross the dangerous Mexican border into the US now exceeds the number of men.

Horizons' partners are standing

are groomed as recruits or are tragic victims of fighting. ACUDESBAL establishes programs to give adolescents safe spaces for expression through arts, sports and music, while protecting them from gang activity.

**Our partners are a steadfast presence in societies with growing disruption.**

The organization also helps young women and men become leaders and role models for their peers. In a country where on average one woman is murdered every day, Visitación Padilla (Women's Movement for Peace), our partner in Honduras, is tackling gender violence head-on. First, by training a group of cyber-activists to confront sexism and discrimination through social media and online platforms.

Our partners are a steadfast presence in societies with growing disruption, but they cannot carry on alone.

The world is heading towards greater uncertainty with economic and health crises, which impact vulnerable and marginalized populations the most. Visitación Padilla says violence against women is growing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as quarantine directives confine many women in the same household as their abusers. ACUDESBAL's community is worried that a repurposed shelter for isolating confirmed cases of COVID-19 may lack proper equipment, staffing and protocols, putting the surrounding population – who live in poverty and have limited access to health services – at great risk.

Now more than ever, we urge you to help Horizons and our partners bring back hope by supporting us today.



I want to help Horizons empower people in Central America and Mexico.

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### INSIDE THIS ISSUE



- COSTA RICA Building a New Gathering Space..... 2
- MIGRANT WORKERS Support during Covid-19 ..... 2
- MNCH UPDATE Planting Deep Roots of Change ..... 3
- NICARAGUA One Woman's Transformation ..... 3
- COVID-19 Our Work Goes On..... 4

# Building a New Gathering Space



Maria and Luis give the new "reading nook" at school – provided by Horizons – the thumbs up!

As one of the few international development agencies operating in Costa Rica, Horizons is proud to support communities and education in one of the most underdeveloped provinces in the country: Puntarenas. With unemployment in rural communities of Puntarenas reaching upwards of 50% and poverty rates affecting approximately 32% of the population in 2019, providing opportunities for youth to stay active and engaged in their communities is at the top of Horizons' priorities.

Over the spring and summer, Horizons will be supporting our new partner, ADI (the Comprehensive Development

Association of Punta Mala) in building a gathering space for the community of Coronado. It will feature a park for youth with a jungle gym, swings and other recreational equipment, seating space for families and a community-run canteen with washrooms. The space will also be used to provide education to families on health, emergency earthquake and tsunami planning and procedures, and environmental protection.

Horizons is also gearing up to support the public elementary schools of Coronado and the neighbouring community of Tres Rios. With very limited supplies, these schools have been forced to

share a few books and flutes among many students. With support from Horizons, close to 300 students in Coronado and Tres Rios will benefit from new books, musical equipment and computers in the classroom.

"One of the best ways to escape the cycle of poverty is education – and Horizons is prepared to invest in strengthening education for youth not just in Costa Rica, but all across Central America and Mexico," says Patricia Rebolledo, Horizons' Executive Director.

## Keeping Kids Safe



"Having grown up here in Coronado, I know kids have nothing to do so they get into trouble; fighting, substance abuse, and delinquency

are not uncommon," says Olger Navarro, a 29-year-old whose home is next door to the proposed park.

"I think a park and gathering space will do a lot of good. People are excited that change is coming to our humble community. Families and children alike are looking forward to having a park and community space to call our own."

# Planting Deep Roots of Change

Four years ago, Horizons of Friendship and our partner PIES de Occidente (the Association for Promotion, Research and Education) launched the MNCH (Maternal, Newborn and Child Health) project in Guatemala. We had a clear, but not so simple, goal of reducing maternal and infant deaths in the western province of Totonicapán. As we bring this project to a close in very uncertain times, we have been reflecting on the impact of this large investment by the Government of Canada, and many of you, Horizons' donors and supporters.

Here are just a few of the things we have achieved together:

- 891 traditional Indigenous midwives have been equipped to provide clean and safe care to women and their babies
- 3,045 frontline health workers have completed training programs on best practices in MNCH care
- 20 nursing students, 237 medical students and 364 of the country's Ministry of Health staff have graduated with a diploma in culturally relevant healthcare
- 2,188 youth have participated in comprehensive sexual education workshops

As a result, we are seeing deeper impacts in the health system of Totonicapán. "Healthcare staff have developed the competencies to provide improved care, and better understand how to deliver culturally



These young women are among the 2,188 youth who have participated in comprehensive sexual education workshops.

respectful healthcare. This means that families are accessing health services more often," notes Dr. Iris Champet, the Project Coordinator with PIES.

The clearest sign that we are getting close to achieving our goal is that we were able to reduce maternal deaths by more than 60% in 2019 compared to 2018.

All of this work will be tested in the

coming months as Guatemala, like the rest of the world, confronts the COVID-19 pandemic. As we work to finalize the project, we know we will have to respond and adjust to this new reality. However, we remain hopeful that through this project we have planted some deep roots of change.



## Maria Angelica's Story

One of the key areas where we are seeing long-term impacts is in the emergency planning we have supported with Totonicapán's Community Health Commissions.

In September 2019, just a day after giving birth in her home in the village of Tierra Colorada, Maria Angelica was bleeding, and had a fever and a severe headache. Members of the local health commission were alerted. These volunteers responded quickly and were able

to convince Maria Angelica's husband that she and her baby needed to be rushed to the nearest health centre.

The commission had transportation ready, and enough money saved to pay for urgent medical tests. When Maria Angelica and her baby were finally well enough to be sent home, the commission monitored her condition during home visits. Thanks to the commission's preparedness, Maria Angelica and her child are healthy today.

# Migrant Workers: Support during COVID-19



Every spring, migrant worker Andres Gonzalez Hernandez comes to Canada to work in the agricultural sector.

Andres is one of over 35,000 workers that arrive in Canada each year through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program, and one of 300 that work in Northumberland County.

The farm where Don Andres works employs around 30 migrant workers each year. "I come from the state of Chiapas, Mexico," says Andres. "For the past couple years, I've worked at an Asian vegetable farm. We mainly produce Asian vegetables like bok choy, gai lan and

Chinese cabbage. I also help maintain the fields and prepare the vegetables to be shipped to Toronto and the US."

With the global pandemic of COVID-19 in full force, this farming season is unlike any other for migrant workers. Upon arrival in Canada, they are being asked to quarantine for 14 days in order to contain the spread of this deadly virus. The workers bring only a few essentials with them from their native country and typically stop at a grocery store on the way to the farms. Now they can't do this for the sake of public health.

To support migrant workers like Andres through this difficult time, Horizons is putting together lifeline care packages that contain food, toiletries, and other items. "Over 100 migrant farmworkers in

Northumberland County will rely on these care packages to get them through their 14-day quarantine," says Daniel Quesada, Horizons' community outreach officer.

Each year, Horizons of Friendship runs the Migrant Worker Outreach Program, which provides migrant workers with access to health, legal, and social services.

"This organization, Horizons of Friendship, has always helped us," says Andres. "Whenever workers get sick or need help with tax or immigration issues, Horizons and its supporters are always willing to lend a hand. I haven't seen support like this in any of the other communities where I have worked in Canada."

# MEC: One Woman's Transformation



Iris Diaz is a maquila (factory) worker in Nicaragua's Free Trade Zone. Low labour costs have driven a boom in this sector. Like 100,000 other women work-

ing in maquilas, Iris is young, poor and a single parent. Having had few educational opportunities, she was grateful for a steady job in a country undergoing a human rights crisis, with high rates of inequality and poverty. This job should have been a godsend, but it isn't that simple.

Work in these factories is difficult. Physical, sexual and emotional abuse by peers and employers is common. Factory positions are intentionally precarious, offering inadequate labour protections and unequal treatment for women workers. The work involves long hours, heavy lifting and exposure to vibration, magnetic fields and chemicals. Workers like Iris are the most fragile in Nicaragua's economy and do not have the option of other employment.

When Iris began working with Horizons and our partner MEC (the Maria Elena Working and Unemployed Women's Movement), she had experienced verbal

abuse, threats and discrimination at work and was unaware of her labour and human rights. As Iris attended MEC workshops, she learned to recognize her rights and defend them.

Quickly putting this into action, she spoke up to a factory owner to ensure her colleague received fair pay. She later shared her experiences with other maquila workers and now volunteers for MEC.

Iris's transformation would not have been possible without your generosity. However, many more need the same support – especially now – since large-scale, COVID-19-related layoffs of maquila workers have left many of these women desperate.