

HORIZONS OF FRIENDSHIP

Horizons

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2016

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO END POVERTY IN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO



This traditional midwife is among 1,040 who will be better able to deliver healthcare to pregnant women and mothers as a result of the project.

Breaking News! On March 22, 2016, Horizons of Friendship signed a major agreement with **Global Affairs Canada** (GAC) for a \$13.2 million dollar, four-year project that aims to save the lives of women and children in Guatemala and provide infants with the very best start in life!

Indigenous women are one of the most vulnerable, marginalized groups in Guatemala. They are twice as likely to die during childbirth as non-indigenous women and mortality among indigenous children under 1 year is 67% higher than the rest of the population.

With only 49 doctors and 37 nurses for a population of 500,000, public health services lack the capacity to effectively serve pregnant indigenous women. As a result, traditional midwives attend 69% of all live births, providing the majority of care to pregnant women, newborns and young children.

The Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) project is an exciting opportunity for Horizons and our partner, the Association for Health Promotion, Research and Education (PIES de

Saving Lives in Guatemala

Occidente), to provide sustainable, accessible maternal and newborn health care by training and equipping 1,040 midwives, 9 health clinics and 50 health promoters, directly benefiting more than 218,000 people.

Pregnant women will receive nourishment, vitamins and medicine for themselves and their children, plus they will gain health knowledge. Counselling and education will focus on prenatal care, breastfeeding, nutrition, immunization, care of newborns and the early warning signs of high-risk pregnancies.

Often relatives of pregnant women and mothers influence healthcare decisions. The MNCH project will therefore work directly with the women and their families (including male partners and extended family members) to ensure that women, infants, and children under five can and do access the health services available to them.

As part of this project, Horizons will also lead exchanges between medical personnel in Canada and Guatemala, providing professional development opportunities for maternal health practitioners in Guatemala and an opportunity to share best practices.

Learn about this exciting project first-hand by joining our Educational Tour to Guatemala in February 2017. See page 3 for more info.

Your Help Still Needed

For this project, the Canadian Government will match every \$1 raised with \$6. Global Affairs Canada has committed to 85% of the project; Horizons must raise the other 15%. That works out to \$450,000 we must

raise each year.

In addition, Horizons remains committed to our many partners and projects in Central America and Mexico that do not receive government funding and desperately need and deserve our financial support to carry out their vital work.

Over the coming year, we will be looking for new fundraising opportunities (your ideas are welcome!) and will continue to count on the loyal, generous support of people like you.



Profile: Dr. Iris Champet

Becoming a doctor was a big dream for Iris Champet, a young indigenous woman in

Guatemala. She felt the call to serve others and to ensure that indigenous women had proper, professional health care that also respected Mayan cultural values.

Through great personal sacrifice, this young woman achieved her goal. Now, Dr. Iris Champet serves her people through her involvement with PIES, the organization that will carry out the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) Project.

Iris not only helped develop the project, she will also be its main coordinator. "Count on all of us to make this dream a reality," she says, "we are all counting on you!"



Global Affairs Canada
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Music and other social activities help youth stay out of gangs.

Pope Francis and other world leaders call the migration from Central America and Mexico a “humanitarian crisis” as tens of thousands of people flee poverty, food insecurity, lack of economic opportunity, systemized violence and gang related crimes.

From October 2015 - January 2016, 21,469 families, the majority women with small children, and 17,370 unaccompanied children were detained at the US border. Their journey to the US is often horrific (*see One Migrant's Story.*)

Horizons is working with its partners to help the people of Central America and Mexico stay in their homeland instead of migrating by addressing the root causes of poverty and violence, and creating “pockets of hope and change.”

In El Salvador, migration is prompted by poverty, increasing gang violence and lack of employment. Horizons’ partner the Association of Communities Working Together for the Economic and Social Development of the Lower Lempa (ACUDESBAL) is working to curb the flow of young people and families out of the country.

Engaging Youth.

ACUDESBAL provides young people with positive opportunities for education, recreation, and social engagement through sports, music, dance, art, leadership and spiritual development. These activities help them build confidence, self-esteem and creative potential, and prevent their involvement in gang activity.

Leadership activities engage youth in the issues of violence facing their communities, with the aim of finding strategies to promote peace and inclusion. This year more than 1,100 youth will be involved! Investing in the next generation and creating these kinds of opportunities is essential to ending violence and poverty in El Salvador and the rest of the region.

ACUDESBAL is also active at the municipal and national levels, contributing to a network of civil society and government organizations to formulate plans for the prevention of violence.

Families Benefit. Through Horizons’ microcredit fund, women can create small businesses or purchase farm animals to provide income for their families. The fund, managed by ACUDESBAL, has provided over 500 loans ranging from \$20 to \$1,000 to support women in self-employment projects that generate income, and increase self-reliance and self-confidence.

The women meet regularly to support and assist one another with the fund management. They participate in

workshops on livestock management, covering topics like vaccination, common diseases, and pasture improvement. Training is also provided on leadership, self-esteem, and women’s rights.



Dairy cows provide fresh milk and income for Sandra.

Loan Helps Family Succeed

Sandra Ramirez, a rural farmer in El Zamoran, El Salvador knows how difficult it is to grow enough food to survive. She and her husband struggled to cultivate enough corn and vegetables to feed their family. With the support of a microcredit loan, she was able to purchase a dairy cow to help her provide food security and economic resources for her family.

The dairy cow has now produced offspring and Sandra dreams of one day having five dairy cows. “With this I have something that is mine, that lets me say, I produced this with my own efforts and this little seed of microcredit. When I return this loan, I feel satisfaction knowing that another woman is waiting for the same opportunity that I received.”

One Migrant's Story

The day gang members came to Roberto’s door, “everything changed for me and my family,” says the 33-year-old farmer from Lower Lempa, El Salvador.

Criminal gangs forcefully recruit new members from the country’s youth, and threaten families who try to protect them. They’d come looking for Roberto’s sisters-in-law, but he refused to give them up, putting his life at risk.

To protect his family, Roberto hired a

human smuggler to get him to the US. He was crammed into the back of a truck with six women and seven children, receiving just one meal a day, and made to hide out in sheds.

At one point, the migrants were forced to walk across a mountain to avoid a radar station. “We walked from seven at night to four in the morning, without drinking water, without light,” says Roberto. “Sometimes we encountered venomous snakes and

the women carrying their children would scream.”

“There are always bands of drug gangs and if you don’t bring money with you for bribes, you pay with your life. When we finally met back up with the truck, we were exhausted, thirsty, wet through and covered in mud. Some of the women had been raped. This part of the journey was horrible.”

Roberto was caught by the US Border Patrol and deported back to El Salvador.

Nicaragua Visit an Adventure

Travelling in a tour bus on a bumpy, rural road, Laurel McKirdy had no doubt she would soon see a part of Nicaragua most tourists don't visit.

McKirdy was one of 12 Canadians on the Horizons of Friendship Educational Tour to Nicaragua from Feb. 8th to 17th 2016. A Horizons donor for more than 20 years, McKirdy felt the time was right to see some of the projects she had supported. The Prince George, B.C. resident wasn't disappointed. "It felt like we got to meet people and see things we would never have seen (on our own)," she says.

And that is the purpose of Horizons' annual educational tours: to allow supporters to go off the beaten track, to experience the culture, the people, the natural environment and the history of a country, interacting with the communities and Horizons' partners along the way.

The Canadian tour members were travelling to meet with "whita", female community judges, who are supported by Horizons' partner, the Association of Indigenous Women of the Atlantic Coast (AMICA). AMICA works in isolated villages on Nicaragua's North Atlantic Coast to improve the social and economic conditions of indigenous women.

It took about two hours for the bus to reach Santa Marta, an indigenous village of Miskitu people. The tour group



Educational tour participants join members of MEC to distribute labour rights booklets to workers.

met inside a "bare-bones" schoolhouse where whita from outlying communities had gathered to share their challenges and successes. These women not only educate villagers on a woman's right to a life free from violence, they also resolve issues of violence within their communities, often at great personal danger.

Despite their struggles, there was laughter, says McKirdy. A community member brought coconuts for the group, and tour members joined the women in a picnic along the river. "The visit to the Atlantic coast was very precious," says McKirdy.

On the Pacific coast of Nicaragua, tour members explored the mountainous region, making an excursion to Mombacho volcano for a hike in the cloud forest. They also visited Nicaragua's

National Museum and artisanal markets, and toured through "los pueblos blancos" (the White Villages), which boast unique arts and crafts.

The group also heard from the Maria Elena Cuadra Working and Unemployed Women's Movement (MEC), which successfully lobbied the government for a law on violence against women and actively defends the rights of women who work in free trade zone sweat shops.

McKirdy is grateful to have seen firsthand the energy, spirit, and resilience that allow the people of Mesoamerica to overcome the challenges they face. She plans on taking another tour, and wants to inspire others to do the same. How about you? See the flyer below for details about the 2017 Educational Tour.



Alani Defends Worker Rights

Alani Barrios introduces herself as a feminist. She is one of several members of MEC who spoke candidly to Canadians travelling to Nicaragua this year.

She described her experiences as a factory worker, noting, "Women working

in factories in Nicaragua usually make less than \$200 a month and the basic needs for a family run about \$600 a month." At work, women face verbal abuse, and are often asked to work extra hours; if they refuse, they are fired.

MEC advocates for women in the workplace, making sure they have the proper equipment and are safe, and supports the rights of women, particularly those working in the free trade zone. It also provides leadership training for young women so they can defend their rights.

Through MEC, Alani was able to study and became a paralegal. She now volunteers with MEC, helping support other women in their pursuit of a better life.

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INTERESTED IN GOING BEYOND the tourist attractions?

Guatemala
February 6-18, 2017

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