

# Maya Educational Foundation

Providing educational opportunities for the Maya



## 2008 Report to Contributors

*My conviction to better myself in life and to some day get a professional degree has been the fuel that motivates me to work and study hard, with all my heart and mind. The scholarship and support from MEF and Sna Jtz'ibajom is making things easier for me and frees me from the worry of not being able to reach my goal.*

José Antonio Girón M., a student pursuing a major in Education in Chiapas

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Dear Friends,

Our report to you this year again contains wonderful stories of successful people and programs made possible by your contributions to the Maya Educational Foundation. We hope that you will read them and be heartened by the depth of your outreach and the courage of the people who are making use of your generosity to get the educations they so greatly deserve. I use the word courage because the Maya continue to face racism and discrimination in all those areas, including education, where their lives intersect with the dominant culture. The struggle to develop one's potential under these circumstances bears witness to that courage.

In addition to the programs in the report, we want to tell you about three new initiatives which aren't quite programs yet, but which we are investigating. In Livingston, Guatemala, we have made contact with a group of Garífuna people, speakers of Garífuna, Spanish and English, who want to offer educational opportunities to their children beyond the elementary level. The Garífuna are even more neglected than the Maya, and the struggle for education involves transportation out of Livingston by boat. In San Pedro Chenalhó, in Chiapas, Mexico, we are looking for ways to help young people, again to obtain an education beyond the elementary level. Dr. Christine Eber of our Board has worked in this area, and we are in the process of setting up an educational fund in memory of her father. Many small communities in this area still face repression and retaliation from the government and the private armed forces of the land owners for their part in the resistance to federal government control. The third initiative is in the northern area of Alta Verapaz in Guatemala in the communities of Michbilrixpu and Salacuim, about three hours from Cobán, where several Q'eqchi básico students need scholarship help to continue their studies. All these hopes and dreams can become true MEF programs with the help of your contributions.

Every year I tell you again how great the need is. Neither Mexico nor Guatemala nor Belize has put additional funding into education, and even if they did, it would probably not get to the young people and adults asking for our help. Schools in these countries are neglected, with few teachers, books, or other resources. We have begun discussing ways to add books, teaching resources, and teacher training to promising schools, another initiative needing funding, but one that has great potential to help more than just a few students.

Please help. So much can be done with just a little money. I know how big your hearts are. We will continue to use your money wisely and efficiently to help as many people as possible. It means so much to the young people whose educations hang in the balance.

With many, many thanks from the MEF Board,

Marilyn M. Moors  
MEF Board President

# MEF Scholarship Programs Overview

Since 1992, MEF has supported the educational and professional advancement of Maya men and women. We believe that education is the key to individual empowerment, whether improving chances for employment, providing for families, or enabling individuals to serve as role models, or to participate more fully in the life of their communities and society at large.

Access to good quality education in the rural Maya regions is limited. Many small communities have only primary schools, and education beyond this level for promising students becomes difficult for their parents when it involves tuition, transportation to another town, and room and board. Often teachers in rural areas are young and inexperienced, and few speak any of the Mayan languages. And discrimination, an ever present problem, becomes even more so when indigenous students go from rural to urban areas.

MEF's best results occur because we encourage three requirements: that the scholarship student have both family and community support; that minimum grade requirements and academic follow-up systems are in place; and that the students "repay" their scholarship by means of community service.

The first MEF scholarships were given at the university level, and many still are. But we now help younger students of promise in Guatemala, Mexico and Belize. We also offer vocational training, workshops, and seminars to Maya of all ages to help improve their skills and advance their careers. In these pages, you can learn of the variety of MEF's many scholarship programs. Please also refer to the sections related to Amigos de San Cristóbal (p. 9) and Maya Traditions, Esperanza Juvenil, Sna Jtz'ibajom and FOMMA (pp. 11–14).

## 2008 Scholarship Programs Summary

### University (60 students)

*Guatemala:* FEP Maya, Guatemala City and Todos Santos

*Chiapas, Mexico:* Sna Jtz'ibajom and FOMMA in San Cristóbal de Las Casas and in the Chuj region

### Middle and High School (151 students)

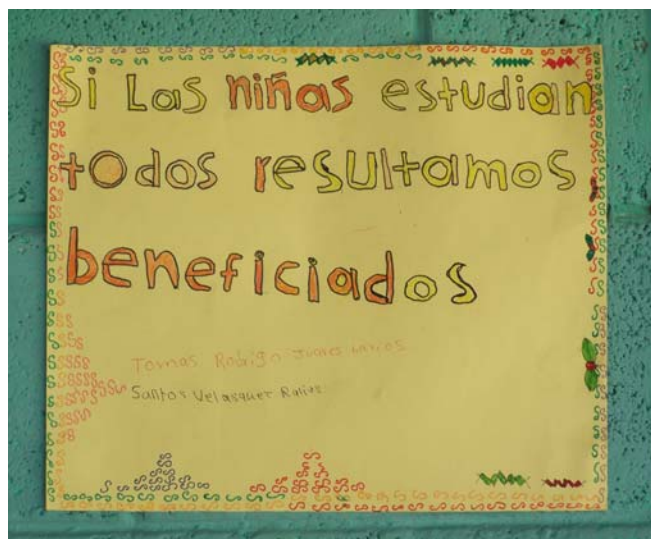
*Guatemala:* Jacaltenango, Nebaj, Todos Santos, Cajolá, Chichicastenango, Nahualá, Guatemala City, Maya Traditions scholarship program in the Lake Atitlán region and Ben & Lois Paul Scholarships (Tz'utujil students)

*Chiapas, Mexico:* Chuj region

*Belize:* La Lagunilla, Toledo District (Q'eqchi' and Mopan students)

### Elementary School (70 students)

*Guatemala:* Todos Santos, Maya Traditions and Esperanza Juvenil in Guatemala City



"If girls study everybody benefits," poster hanging in an elementary/middle school in Patzulá, Guatemala

## Other Scholarship Programs under Consideration

As indicated in the President's letter, MEF is exploring other program initiatives in remote areas, including scholarships for Garifuna young people in Livingston, Guatemala; for Q'eqchi students from Michbilixpu, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala; and for Tsotsil students from the Chenalhó region of Chiapas. We have begun fund raising for these programs and your donations will support these efforts.

# FEPMaya Scholarships

The Fundación para Estudios y Profesionalización Maya (FEPMaya) is a Guatemalan non-profit foundation that helps Maya students reach their university level educational goals and supports them with MEF scholarships (*becas*) and a program of parallel education in the form of seminars, talks, and regular group meetings at their offices. FEPMaya's support and open doors often make the difference between success and failure at the university level.

Lucía Sebaquijay, the long-time manager of this scholarship program, is the link between the Maya students and the MEF. Her work is supported by an accountant, and a board of Guatemalan Maya volunteers who select the students. She has first-hand knowledge of the difficulties students have in succeeding. Students who must find tuition, room, board, and transportation to finish their pre-university work, often end up in high schools where they face discrimination, prejudice, and the total ignorance of their culture. She writes: "On average, only one in ten indigenous students in Guatemala reaches and completes secondary level schooling, and of that number only half graduate. From that group an even smaller number of young people will fight on to go to university and reach their dream of a university degree."

MEF scholarships, through FEPMaya, are vital for educational success. University educations are only available in the largest cities, where the students must live at great expense. The students face discrimination and exclusion at the universities and in their search for a safe and affordable place to live. If they come from rural areas, they also experience urban culture shock and feel homesick and disrespected. FEPMaya helps, not only with the scholarship money, but by bringing students together in a group, providing motivation and moral support. They meet older students and see how they have managed and made progress. Lucía continues, "Results are slow and sometimes frustrating, but with the support from MEF, 81 students have graduated with university degrees and are now self-confident professionals in Guatemalan society, carrying their Maya heritage proudly." Lucía asks us all to maintain support for this program and help Maya students realize their dreams of higher education.

Recently, two women graduates, now lawyers thanks to MEF scholarships, spoke to current students at a very emotional meeting about how hard it was to persist and graduate with a university degree. One described how one of her professors repeatedly "lost" her grades or proof of attendance so that she had to repeat several courses. It took her nine years to get her degree, persevering through unfair treatment and abuse. She is so glad that she did.



MEF and FEPMaya board members addressing the students



Monthly seminar at FEPMaya's facilities



University students in 2008



Law graduate giving her testimony



# Todos Santos Scholarships

Todos Santos Cuchumatán is a large Mam speaking Maya community in a remote region of Guatemala's western highlands. Over the past ten years, MEF has supported about 20 students from this area. Earlier this year, MEF staff and Board members, together with Board members from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation, visited Todos Santos to see how the scholarship students were doing.

Parents and students welcomed us at the house of Señora Felipa Jiménez, our scholarship supervisor in Todos Santos. Parents here are strongly involved in their children's education. One father, a corn and potato farmer from the surrounding hills, described how impossible it would be to send his children to middle or high school without scholarship help.

Todos Santos, despite noticeable progress in some areas, still lacks a school where students can get a *diversificado* degree, qualifying them for jobs such as accountants or elementary school teachers. The closest such school is in Huehuetenango, two hours away, and a year of schooling there costs about \$2,000 per student, beyond the reach of most students without a scholarship. One recent graduate told us how happy she is to be a teacher now, a dream she thought would be impossible since her mother is ill and the family is very poor.

Parents and students meeting with members from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation and MEF



Dinner with parents and students in Huehuetenango



Our group, augmented by several fathers, traveled to Huehuetenango to meet with the Todos Santos students studying there. At a dinner together, fathers shared their con-



Parents talk about how the scholarship program has impacted their families

cerns about the students being so far from home and losing the traditional values of the community. The students, especially the girls, talked about their problems being away from home. But all focused on their hopes for the future and their career goals as lawyers, architects, nurses or teachers. They were awed that people so far away from them, who do not even know them, care enough to help them with their education. They asked us to thank you for your support and your interest in them.



# Jacaltenango Scholarships

MEF has provided scholarships for a group of *diversificado* students in the western highland town of Jacaltenango for over 10 years. Two students graduated in 2007 with teaching degrees for elementary school. In 2008, five students are continuing their studies, with two expected to graduate at the end of this school year. The program has operated efficiently and at low cost because of the initiative

and dedication of the voluntary scholarship supervisor, Mercedes Montejo, who monitors the students and even houses some who come from outlying areas. Mercedes reports that the generous support from MEF donors has made it possible for young Mayas from the area to become accountants and teachers. At a cost of \$400 a year for each student, this program offers great results for your support.

## Grupo Cajolá

Grupo Cajolá is an organization of Mam Maya people from the town of Cajolá in the department of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, and from Morristown, New Jersey. Cajolá has a poverty rate of almost 94 percent, and almost half the town has migrated to the US to earn money for food, medical care, housing, and education for their families. Some of these people settled in the area of Morristown, New Jersey.

The Cajolenses in New Jersey and those in Guatemala have joined forces for the betterment of both community groups. Some have returned to Cajolá where they

are working to organize the community for a better life. So far, they have provided an internet center, literacy training, a women's development group, an egg farm, fair trade weaving and sewing groups, and health workshops. They provide seminars on history, politics, and Maya culture, and have begun community organizing to advocate for political and human rights in Guatemala and abroad.

For the past two years, Grupo Cajolá has coordinated a scholarship program for middle and high school students. In 2008, Grupo Cajolá and MEF provided 14 scholarships.



As Julieta Patrocinia Hernández Pérez, a high school student, says:

*I thank the donors of our scholarships from the United States. For me, the scholarship that I receive is very important, because it has helped me a lot economically during this year of my student life. Also, I have learned something about Maya cosmovision that they teach us every Saturday, and also about political formation through popular education. My goal is to graduate [from high school] and continue at the university to prosper and to share my knowledge with the people that need it.*

For information about Grupo Cajolá, please visit their website, [www.grupocajola.org](http://www.grupocajola.org)



Eduardo Jiménez, Coordinator of Grupo Cajolá, checks student assignments and leads a weekly seminar



Student discussion group

*I want to thank the people who have given us the scholarships through Grupo Cajolá. The scholarships are a big help for our town, especially for us students who want to learn and have knowledge of other cultures... With these scholarships and our own and our parents efforts...we will be able to make a difference through social change...*

Mirna Imelda Huinil D., a middle school student



# Colegio Bilingüe Intercultural Paxil

Colegio Bilingüe Intercultural Paxil is a middle school in Nebaj, Guatemala that promotes tolerance and intercultural values. The school serves mainly students from poor families in the remote communities of the Ixil region and the town of Nebaj. Staff and faculty interact regularly with the parents, and the school participates in important community events. MEF's staff visited the school in January, along with representatives from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation. We witnessed the



work they had accomplished in their first six years of existence with minimal educational resources. MEF provides scholarships for 50 students and general support for the school. On the basis of this trip, the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation gave the Colegio a grant to acquire books, musical instruments, looms, and weaving materials. Music instruction is now being provided and weaving classes now take place on Sundays.



Students learn different techniques at the new weaving classes at Colegio Paxil



Board members of Colegio Paxil, Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation and MEF in Nebaj, February 2008



At the Principal's office of Colegio Paxil

Parents participating in a workshop about the importance of their involvement in their children's education





## Benjamin and Lois Paul Scholarships

Four years ago, MEF established this program to honor the work the Pauls did with Tz'utujil speaking people on the western and southern shores of Lake Atitlán beginning in the 1940s. The scholarship program is focused on students from more remote Tz'utujil communities, located between the southern shore of the Lake and the Pacific Coast. These communities are often neglected, and face the disintegration of their Maya culture. The program coordinator, Ajpub' Pablo Ixmatá, initially identified two young women from San Pedro Cutzán who had ceased hoping to com-

plete their educations. The scholarships provided for their school fees and materials plus room and board in San Pedro La Laguna. Their first year was hard and their adaptation to their new environment difficult, but they helped each other and this year they graduated with honors and became elementary school teachers.

In 2008, this program aided seven students, four in middle school (*básico*) and three in high school (*diversificado*). Other Tz'utujil area projects are covered in the article on Oxlajuj B'atz. (see p. 15).



Students who graduated as teachers participate in a Seminar for young Tz'utujil



Visiting Tz'utujil students in San Pedro La Laguna, February 2008

## Chuj Scholarships in Chiapas

Eastern Chiapas contains 36 Chuj settlements, approximately 6,000 people in all, including former refugees from the Guatemalan civil war and their families. In 2006, MEF began a scholarship program in coordination with the Sociedad Cooperativa "Productores Alternativos de la Selva" (PAS). Prior to this program only seven Chuj students had completed a high school/technician level education and all were men. The only Chuj student with a CPA degree found work at PAS. Now seven more students, four young women and three young men, are in advanced pro-

grams. Two are supported by PAS and five by the MEF, including the only Chuj woman from Chiapas attending university. Although the need outstrips the existing program, this modest start has been very successful and has prompted other initiatives, including the promotion of Chuj identity. Through the work of the project coordinator, Fernando Limón, and calling on the expertise of linguists experts and Sna Jtz'ibajom (see p. 13), they are developing course materials in their native language and a program to teach Chuj literacy to members of these communities.



Fernando Limón with Chuj student and family

*I am happy for having the support of a scholarship. Now I know that I will be able to finish my career and perhaps continue my studies beyond.*

Guadalupe Sántiz R., studying Management and development of indigenous communities

# Belize Scholarships

The Julian Cho Society is a non-governmental indigenous rights organization in Belize whose mission includes a responsibility to assist Maya communities to identify and implement programs to create employment, self-reliance, and improvement of the quality of life. Education is a part of this mandate and the Society promotes educational opportunities for children in the rural Toledo District of Belize. MEF has partnered with the Julian Cho Society for the past two years to create a secondary education scholarship program for Maya children from poor families in southern Belize. Through the Society, MEF supports ten Q'eqchi and Mopan students from nine villages to attend high school at the Toledo Community College and the Julian Cho Technical High School.

The Society established a community service requirement for the students as a way for them to give back to their home villages. Cristina Coc, the Society's Executive Director, reports that all the students are doing well, and writes: "The Scholarship Program continues to be a major success and a very important factor for the advancement of Maya children in southern Belize. We have been impressed with the academic commitment and achievements of our scholars after only two years of operation. The JCS and the rural children of the Toledo District are very grateful for the continued support of this program by the Maya Educational Foundation. We thank you for believing in our potential and for supporting our efforts."



Pamfelia Cowo y Abidas Ash,  
art students



Patrocinio Peck, Maximiliano Teck and Elvira Pop,  
students at the Toledo Community College



Sarah Ack, construction  
student at the Julian Cho  
Technical Highschool



Parents and students at a meeting with the Julian Cho Society staff  
in June 2008



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*The support from MEF has been vital for me in my professional and personal life and in shaping my views both as a Maya and a Guatemalan citizen... It is a novelty to see indigenous people working in academic positions in Guatemala.*

Edgar Esquit

Edgar Esquit is a former MEF scholarship recipient from the Kaqchikel region who obtained a masters degree in Social Anthropology from CIESAS, Guadalajara, Mexico and a PhD in Social Sciences from Colegio de Michoacán, Mexico. He is currently a researcher and professor at the Instituto de Estudios Interétnicos of the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City.

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# Amigos de San Cristóbal

As it starts its fourth annual grant cycle and completes three years of existence, Amigos has attained a high profile in San Cristóbal de Las Casas and much of Chiapas, Mexico. Through its partnership with carefully selected regional NGOs, Amigos helps improve the lives of many of the neediest through better education, health programs and economic initiatives. Some of the programs supported by Amigos with contributions made to the Maya Educational Foundation are:

- *Manos Amigas* - This successful program, started and managed by local Mexican citizens, is dedicated to rehabilitating adolescent boys who have been in trouble and/or come from home environments not suitable for children.

- *Germinalia* - An all-volunteer organization implementing a program that helps indigenous scholarship recipients from rural communities pursuing a college education learn effective study habits and make the transition from a rural to an urban setting. This is the second year of a university scholarship which includes room and board for a Maya woman who completed her first year with high marks. Amigos' funds will also help *Germinalia* relocate to a new center where tutoring and counseling services will be provided to more students.

- *Desarrollo Educativo Sueniños* - This organization has inaugurated a program called "Leer y Jugar" ("Read and Play"), which helps develop the fun of reading for early elementary school-aged children from marginalized urban neighborhoods. The program has been very well received by children, parents and community leaders. Due to its ongoing success, a school in a poor neighborhood of San Cristóbal has invited *Sueniños*' volunteers to implement the program in conjunction with its teachers.

- *Hogar Comunitario Yachil Antzetic* - This program provides education to expectant single mothers with young children. Participants are trained in marketable skills so they can survive



on their own and care for their children. Prenatal and nutrition classes are also provided, as well as a psychologist who teaches self-esteem, responsibility and addresses the individual life issues that result in pregnancy. The young children are taught to develop mutual respect and to avoid confrontation and to live in a harmonious environment after new siblings are born.

- *Madre Tierra* - Through the program "Health Promoters in the Sierra," *Madre Tierra* offers training to community representatives so that they can provide basic medical care and educate residents about how they can improve sanitary conditions in their communities, many of which are still suffering from the devastation of Hurricane Stan in 2005. Trained health promoters have begun to conduct health education workshops in regional communities. *Madre Tierra* wants to eventually build a medical clinic and its own vocational training center.

For more information about Amigos de San Cristóbal, please visit their website [www.amigosdesc.org](http://www.amigosdesc.org)



Volunteer of Wabash College reads to a student



Volunteer of Hanover College, Sueniños Instructor and children participating in the *Jugar y Leer* program

# English Language Program

## Embracing English in Guatemala

*The gift is ours, the difference is theirs.* Hali Wickner, volunteer since 2005

Sun pierced the December morning mist, illuminating the volcanoes behind the bell tower of our Antigua hotel as we finalized plans for the two-week English Language Project (ELP). We were 14 volunteer teachers, ranging from high school seniors to Medicare seniors—most veterans of a prior year—preparing to welcome the class of '07.

Entering its fourth year, the program for MEF scholarship students at Guatemalan universities was on a roll, its curriculum well honed: mornings for individual tutoring and logical progression in English conversation, afternoons and evenings for shared group activities. It begins at 8:30 am; but as always, chatting students gather earlier, eager to embrace English. This group included a cadre of basic level nursing students along with advanced engineers and architects. We adapt to meet their wide-ranging needs and interests.

All the students love reading, and the *Cat in the Hat* has been a perennial favorite. We added afternoon book groups, discussing passages from the Popol Vuh—the Mayan creation story—among others. These along with visiting the CIRMA Mesoamerican archives (see p. 17) or viewing Martin Luther King's *I Have a Dream* speech stirred provocative conversations as students grappled with thoughtful English expression.

Other events—basketball and soccer, a talent show or dancing—brought out the playful and the skillful. At a court one afternoon we encountered Guatemala's wheelchair basketball champions training for a Central America tournament. The team worked with one of our students, a physical therapist, and invited us to join them, enticing some to play from borrowed wheelchairs. Talent night, instructors introduced humor in silly skits, while students showcased their flair for performance—in poetry, song and music.

The fortnight passed quickly to graduation, a celebration with alumni, cheers and tears. Clearly the students spoke English with more confidence and facility, and hopefully their gains last. Certainly the privilege of connecting with such remarkable and resilient young Maya enriches and endures. Their spirited generation is moving into the professional pipeline determined to shape a different future for families, friends and fellow citizens. The fifth ELP approaches. Ours is the gift to give; theirs is the difference to make.



Class in the courtyard



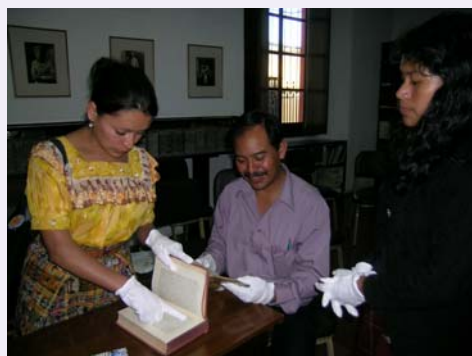
Volunteer working with student



Reading *Cat in the Hat*



Gift from students  
to teachers



Visiting CIRMA archives



A student addressing  
ELP teachers and students



## English Language Program in Chiapas

Steve Homer, a volunteer from California, spent two months in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Mexico in 2006 setting up an English language program for students. From that small beginning, MEF now provides scholarships to three promising students to continue their English studies at language schools in the area.

In February and March of this year, Steve returned for another round of teaching English, arranging classes for 15 students at different skill levels. University scholarship students and people from Sna Jtz'ibajom and FOMMA participated (see related articles on pp. 13 and 14). Steve also offered one-on-one tutoring to motivated students who are now candidates

for scholarships for extended language learning at private schools. The ever-skillful Steve also helped set up a wireless internet system at FOMMA and assisted both Sna Jtz'ibajom and FOMMA with their English language software to make it more accessible to students. We thank Steve for his generosity in sharing his multiple skills with our partners.

## Maya Traditions

MEF's partnership with Maya Traditions, a fair-trade, non-profit social service organization located in Panajachel, began in 2007. It works with Maya women weavers and artisans to create better economic opportunities and to preserve Maya culture and traditions. The group offers three programs. An Artistry Program focuses on the design, production, and sale of quality textiles and other crafts. The Education Program provides scholarships to children of the participants. And the Health Program teaches the propagation of medicinal plants and the production of herbal remedies for use and sale.



and learn about pertinent issues like teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and birth control.

MEF's role in 2008 was to help Maya Traditions with the 112 scholarships they currently offer at all pre-university levels. The program is well coordinated, with visits to monitor student progress. And students repay this caring by programs of community service. This year, after participating in a training program offered by an NGO, five students delivered a workshop on sexual and reproductive health, providing an opportunity for the participants to talk openly



Julio Miguel Fumax Pérez, Director, and colleagues of the medicinal herb garden explain the herb selection process to MEF board member



Students participating in a workshop in Jucanyá, Panajachel



President of the Daniele Agostino Derosi Foundation and the Maya Traditions' Director meeting the production planning team

# Esperanza Juvenil (Boys Hope Girls Hope Guatemala)

Esperanza Juvenil is a project in Guatemala City that serves 50 children and youth who come from difficult backgrounds in which they do not have families or their families cannot support their education. MEF has collaborated with Esperanza Juvenil since 2006 and currently supports scholarships for 12 Maya students. Embracing the philosophy of giving a good start to children as early as possible, the goal of Esperanza Juvenil is to provide young people with the opportunity to pursue their education from elementary through college level, so that they can reach their maximum potential as individuals and become contributing members of society. One-third of the students speak Spanish as a second language. Their first languages include Tz'utujil, K'iche' and Kaqchikel.

Most of the students live in family-like residential homes run by Esperanza Juvenil, while some are Day Scholars, who are in great need of Esperanza Juvenil's program, but are able to live with their immediate families. At the primary level, students attend the Esperanza Juvenil Elementary School. Here the program addresses the need for intensive instruction for the youngest students, who have often not had the benefits of early education, nutrition or supportive home environments. Classes focus on basic subjects, with additional classes in computers, English and Mayan languages and culture. This year, alongside some volunteers, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders participated in a community service activity, painting a home and bringing some joy to a group of disabled children.



Middle and High School students attend private schools in Guatemala City and receive an additional four hours of tutoring and academic reinforcement at Esperanza Juvenil daily. In addition to their school work, the students receive art, music, dance, soccer and swimming classes. They go on campouts, are active members of local churches, take cultural and educational trips, receive visits from local and international leaders, and give back to their community through volunteer work.

At the end of July two teenage scholars participated in a World Leadership Congress in Washington, DC, discussing with students from other countries world issues faced by their generation. Three scholars entered the university this year and four more, recently graduated from high school, will join them next year. University level students live in homes near the Esperanza Juvenil residential homes and provide tutoring, mentoring and administrative help to Esperanza Juvenil as a way to give back and to serve as role models for younger students.

Esperanza Juvenil recently purchased an adjoining building. Renovations will begin over the winter and will add six classrooms and other study areas. With this new space, Esperanza Juvenil is moving towards opening their own junior high school, so that students can study full time at the Esperanza Juvenil campus until they reach high school level.

To learn more about Esperanza Juvenil, visit their website [www.esperanzajuvenil.org](http://www.esperanzajuvenil.org)



Scholarship student in computer lab at Esperanza Juvenil

Students visit the Esperanza Juvenil store, where they purchase treats with "points" they earn for outstanding work



Volunteer reading to children



Library check-out



# Sna Jtz'ibajom (The House of the Writer)



Sna Jtz'ibajom/Cultura de los Indios Mayas is a non-profit organization consisting of ten indigenous actors and writers, based in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. Sna's mission is to preserve and expand the knowledge of indigenous culture and traditions, languages and literature, and to raise awareness about current social issues and teach about history and indigenous rights. MEF has been a long-time supporter of Sna's work, especially in the areas of education, literacy and theater. For the past ten years, Sna has helped administer MEF's university scholarship program in Chiapas.



Lilia Jiménez Guzmán, President of Sna Jtz'ibajom, reports about the work they have done this year in the five program areas pertaining to their mission:

- *Literacy programs* - 180 students from nine communities participated in Sna's bilingual literacy classes in order to learn to read and write their indigenous language as well as Spanish. New teachers were introduced and held the workshops in the communities using updated educational materials.
- *Theater* - Sna brought their original plays aimed at children and the general public to various communities and municipalities in Chiapas. In the Zoque region, Sna recently performed the play *Creative Child Weekends* in collaboration with the State Center of Indigenous Language Arts and Literature.
- *Literature* - Sna produced several texts in Tzeltal and Tsotsil. They are traditional stories from the Mayan communities, which will be part of a forthcoming anthology of oral tradition.
- *Photography/Video/Radio* - Sna created and staged forty photographic works for exhibitions in different towns. So far, more than six hundred people have seen the shows in the municipalities of Chamula, Tenejapa, and Zinacantán. Sna also recorded a video of the ceremony of the Virgin of Banavil and showed it in different towns in Tenejapa. Radio productions included the taping of traditional music performers and the production of 1,000 CDs with traditional music from Chamula, Tenejapa, and Zinacantán. Sna also produced two educational radio segments with stories, legends, myths, and fables in the indigenous Tzeltal and Tsotsil languages with Spanish translations.
- *University Scholarships* – This year Sna is monitoring seventeen MEF scholarship students from Chiapas at universities in various states of Mexico and even abroad. Their majors are: teaching, medicine, sociology, anthropology, international relations, law, agronomy, and economics. To date 25 students have obtained their professional degrees, five during 2008. Most of them have found employment.

For more information, contact

snajtzibaj@hotmail.com

or visit their website

<http://pages.prodigy.net/gbonline/casaescr.html>



Literacy classes



Theater



Video recording of a Tseltal ceremony



Chamula musicians  
recording traditional music

# FOMMA (Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya)



FOMMA is an organization of Maya women from Mexico, located in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, with a focus on indigenous and women's rights, literacy, cultural preservation and education.

At the end of August 2008, the long awaited FOMMA/Centro Hemisférico was inaugurated in a three-day event with the participation of special guests, academics, artists, various international organizations, and MEF scholarship students acting as moderators. This cultural center houses theater and performance space, as well as space for workshops for Maya women and children and a nursery. FOMMA's dramatic works focus on the rights of indigenous women, ecology, family issues, health education and cultural pride. Their award winning plays have been performed locally and internationally.

An important part of FOMMA's mission is the empowerment of Maya women. To this end they provide workshops in literacy and vocational training. By learning their own indigenous languages as well as Spanish, and receiving training in new skills such as baking, tailoring, and computers, the women are better equipped to improve the lives of their families. This year, with the help of a grant from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation, FOMMA was able to provide scholarships for ten Tzeltal women and ten Tzotzil women to attend bilingual literacy classes. Additionally, FOMMA received support from Amigos de San Cristóbal (see p. 9) to purchase additional sewing machines to expand their tailoring workshops.

FOMMA also coordinates a university scholarship program funded by MEF. In 2008, 17 students received scholarships to attend universities in Chiapas. They have ambitious goals, seeking

careers in many fields, such as law, dentistry, economics, teaching, history and social anthropology. Two students graduated this year. Scholarships help pay for tuition, room and board, transportation, and course materials, without which the students would not be able to continue their studies. They praise the new things they have learned and the new experiences they have had through interaction with fellow students and performing community service at FOMMA as part of their scholarships. On weekends, they teach literacy classes in their native languages for adults and children, and they are proud to be able to give back to their communities and contribute to the preservation of Maya culture.



More information about FOMMA can be found at [www.fommachiapas.org](http://www.fommachiapas.org) and at [www.hemi.nyu.edu/fomma/](http://www.hemi.nyu.edu/fomma/)



Literacy classes at the FOMMA/Hemispheric Center, January 2008



FOMMA members with the representatives of the Hemispheric Center at the new Centro Hemisférico facilities in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas



Honorary board member Mimi Laughlin, left, with FOMMA coordinators at the end of a visit by State representatives from Chiapas, center



## Oxlajuj B'atz' (Thirteen Threads)

MEF helps to fund Oxlajuj B'atz', a collaborative educational program founded in 2004, working among women weavers. This program currently serves about 300 indigenous women in 15 groups in rural areas of Guatemala. Their workshops help women become more independent and self-sustaining, reversing the effects of poverty and improving the quality of their lives. Their work falls in four areas: artisan techniques, democracy and group organization, women's health, and small business skills. Educational initiatives include teaching about family planning and sharing the expertise and know-how from Maya Traditions (see p. 11) on herbal health. The production of shampoos, ointments, cough syrups and medicine kits has been the result of this undertaking.

Oxlajuj B'atz' is also expanding to reach more groups of women artisans in Guatemala. One such new group is Xeabaj II, in Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán where, thanks to a grant from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation, workshops on candle making have been provided. This is a newfound skill for the women in a community that has no electricity. Other groups are also being considered. One in Cajolá (see p. 5), another one from San Pedro La Laguna and two more integrated by Tz'utijil women living in communities that have been neglected for quite some time and face complete disintegration of the Maya. MEF is currently providing scholarships to students from that region (see p. 7 Ben and Lois Paul Scholarships).

After receiving several generous grants, OB now offers a micro-credit program that provides loans at very low or no interest to women who want to start a business. The project began with 12 women from San Rafael in Rabinal. In August 21 women from Patanik and Santiago initiated a basic sewing course and, in October, 16 women from Chirijquiac, near Quetzaltenango, joined the program. Af-

ter meeting the requirement to take this course, most women have taken out loans to purchase sewing machines. Other groups plan to



take advantage of the loan program, which is expanding to include other productive endeavors as well.

A donor who sent funds for Oxlajuj B'atz' to purchase sewing machines writes:

*When I heard about the Oxlajuj B'atz' initiative to offer micro credits to buy sewing machines and to provide sewing courses to help women in rural Guatemala, it appealed to me on many levels. In rural Germany over 40 years ago, I ran a tiny tailoring shop out of one room in my house. With an ever-growing family, I had to earn more and took the plunge and started my own company. Without a loan, I could not have done it.*

Now almost 80 years young, he knows that with a sewing machine and hard work, one can make a good living. He is happy to support Oxlajuj B'atz' in their effort to help rural Guatemalan women become independent and successful.



Oxlajuj B'atz' fieldworkers



Candle making workshop in Xeabaj II



The Chiapas Photography Project, begun in 1992, provides training in photography to Mayas. To date, many exhibits and seven books produced by Maya photographers have resulted in a unique documentation of the special events and daily life of their indigenous communities.

Lok'tamayach, a subsidiary organization of Maya photographers, and the Archivo Fotografico Indígena, a photo archive for the works of over 200 individuals from ten different ethnic groups of Chiapas, have extended and developed the work of the Chiapas Photography Project. The archive is cataloged and maintained by members of Lok'tamayach. Regular activities include workshops, exhibits, outreach events and education to encourage the preservation of the Mayan cultural identity through photography.

*Mirror to Our World*, a limited-edition portfolio produced in 2007, is now being acquired by private collectors,

libraries and museums. In 2008, the Chiapas Photography Project began distribution of a multimedia culture kit, *Our*

*Maya Way of Life*, which includes a photography exhibit, thirty cultural objects, and supporting materials, including a book, CDs, and a facilitator's guide. The kit will be used by groups interested in exploring contemporary Maya life. Other outreach activities this year included seminars and the exhibit "A Celebration of Everyday Life" at the Flint Institute of Arts, in Michigan at which Antonia y Juana, two of the women photographers and the Project director, Carlota Duarte, engaged visitors at the museum and local schools in educational events.

The Chiapas Photography Project is supported by several organizations including the MEF. We welcome contributions to an endowment fund that supports this program. For further information, visit [www.chiapasphoto.org](http://www.chiapasphoto.org)



Ongoing photography training at Lok'tamayach



Limited-edition portfolio *Mirror to Our World*



Mayan photographers Juana and Antonia taking pictures during their visit to Michigan



Antonia explains her work at the Flint Institute of Arts



# CIRMA (Center for Research of the Mesoamerican Region)

adapted from a report from Lucrecia Arriola de Paniagua, Program Director

CIRMA's thirty year history as a center for academic research in the social sciences has revolved around the preservation of Guatemala's historical, visual and cultural heritage, and the promotion of a society that is informed, consistent, tolerant, and just. The Maya Educational Foundation supports CIRMA by underwriting the Central American Social Sciences Library, a bibliographic resource of over 70,000 specialized books dating from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the present day; the Guatemalan Photographic Archive, containing works from 1850 to the present which record the life of the country; and the Guatemalan Historical Archive, consisting of 42 more recent collections of over seven million documents. MEF's contributions make possible the preservation, the accession, and the availability of these documents for academic study.

CIRMA's recent programs have involved large-scale, multi-disciplined, collaborative efforts to understand the



inter-ethnic history, relations, and identity in the region. They include: (1) an international graduate fellowship program that enables Guatemalans to pursue advanced degrees at universities around the world and have given priority to women and others formerly excluded in national life; (2) the 2004 Inter-ethnic Dialogue “¿Por qué estamos como estamos?” to examine the problems of racism and promote dialogue at the community level; (3) a Study Abroad at CIRMA program which has, to date, involved sixty undergraduate and graduate students from eleven US universities; and (4) Studies in Labor and Agrarian Law which administers six scholarships for Guatemalans to study in these fields in Colombia and Costa Rica.

MEF's generous donors make possible the preservation of CIRMA's intellectual treasures and insure their availability to today's scholars. Our thanks to all. Information about CIRMA is available at [www.cirma.org.gt](http://www.cirma.org.gt)



Stabilizing glass negatives  
Fototeca Guatemala, November 2008



Cataloging photographs  
Fototeca Guatemala, November 2008



Library's reference room,  
November 2008



Historical Archive Director during a guided tour with  
the Swiss Ambassador in Guatemala, April 2008

## News from Yax Te' Books

Yax Te' Books is the only US-based book distributor specializing in Maya authors, and sells regularly to the bookstores of many US universities as well as to numerous individuals. Yax Te' also distributes photography books produced by Tsotsil and Tseltal-speaking Maya photographers and published by the Chiapas Photography Project, a non-profit artistic project in Chiapas, Mexico, which is also supported by MEF (see article on p. 16).

In addition, Yax Te' has made book donations in Guatemala to the Vacation Schools Project in the Tz'utujil region, directed by MEF associate Ajpub' Pablo García Ixmatá and funded by Aid and Education, Inc. With the coordination of a colleague in Guatemala, Florencio Calí, Yax Te' is preparing kits for distribution to the community libraries sponsored by the Riecken Foundation in Guatemala and Honduras.



Yax Te' staff regularly participate in programs and projects domestic and abroad that disseminate its books and related materials, including the presentation of workshops on the educational use of their materials and other Mayan cultural products. MEF supports Yax Te's important mission of preserving the rich cultural heritage of the Maya.

Other Yax Te's activities included an exhibition of Mayan *cortes* and *huipiles* at the Church of the Savior in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. The exhibition was part of the Arts in the Cathedral Program and included a well-attended invited lecture on Mayan spirituality. The display included 18 hand-woven traditional women's blouses from the private collection of Dr. Laura Martin, program Co-director. The illustrated talk related weavings to Mayan cosmology and philosophy and to the celebration of ceremonies based on the Mayan calendar.

For more information visit [www.yaxtebooks.com](http://www.yaxtebooks.com)

### Exhibition of textiles at the Church of the Savior, Cleveland Heights, Ohio



Panels of *huipiles* on exhibit

### A recent publication of Yax Te' Books



*Huipil* (blouse) and *corte* (skirt) from San Idelfonso Ixtahuacán, Sololá, Guatemala, ca. 1970

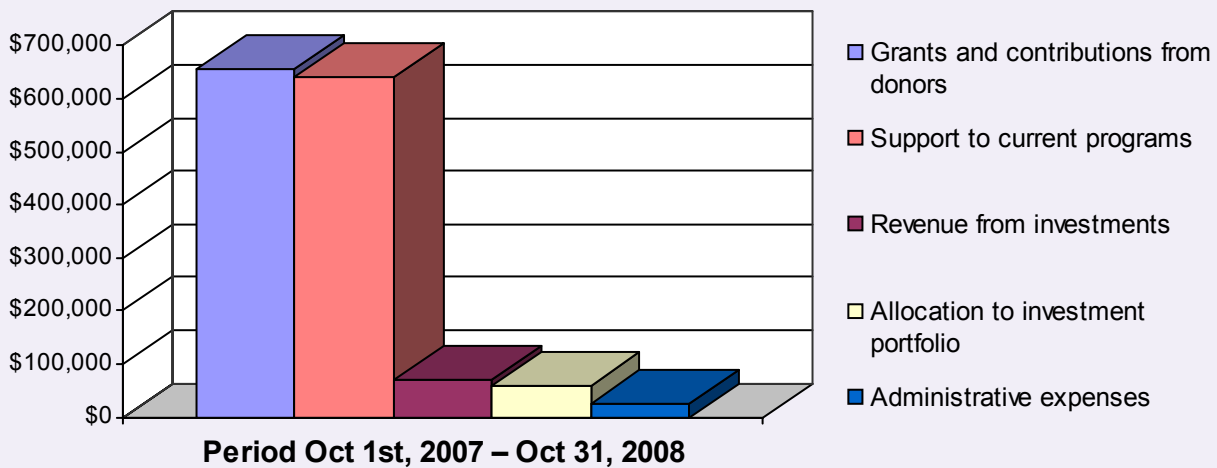




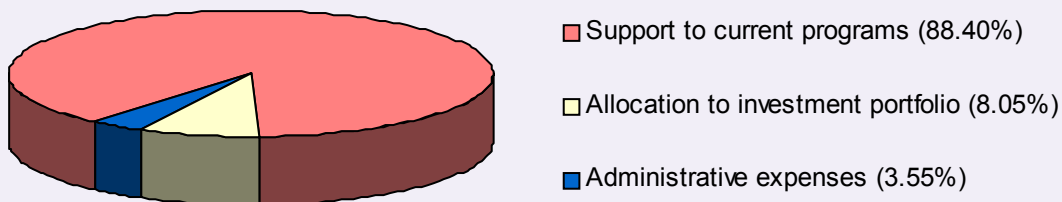
# Money Matters

MEF's finances for the period of October 1st, 2007–October 31, 2008

Grants and contributions from donors	\$ 655,686
Revenue from investments	\$ 69,306
<b>Total income</b>	<b>\$ 724,992</b>
Support to current programs	\$ 640,820
Administrative expenses	\$ 25,757
Allocation to investment portfolio	\$ 58,415
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$ 724,992</b>



## Expenses



As illustrated by the articles and figures presented in this newsletter, MEF strives to maximize the impact of your contributions by focusing on efficiency and collaboration with other organizations and individuals.

We are clearly living in a time of economic insecurity that has forced individuals, business

and philanthropic organizations to rethink their spending. Yet, charity, that noble human attribute, continues to leave its mark. We sincerely thank all the generous donors who allow MEF to fulfill its commitments on an ongoing basis and whose support, in times of hardship, is even more important to help those less fortunate.

# How You Can Help

There are different ways you can help MEF:

- by sponsoring an event in your community to bring awareness to our mission
- by volunteering your time and expertise to enhance an ongoing program
- by considering a bequest to MEF
- by making a financial contribution
- by making a gift of appreciated securities
- by including MEF in your Company's matching gift program

## Your donations at work

\$ 180 supports the education of a university student for one month.

\$ 85 supports a student in high school for one month.

\$ 45 supports a student in middle school for one month.

\$ 25 helps parents send a child to elementary school for one month.

\$ 45 covers the cost of teaching a Maya how to read and write his or her native language in six months.

Any amount helps provide a variety of workshops and vocational training.

MEF is a 501(c)(3) public charity. All donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

## Maya Educational Foundation

Route 106, P.O. Box 38, South Woodstock, VT 05071, USA  
mayaedfund@aol.com • www.mayaedufound.org  
Tel: (802) 457-1199 • Fax: (802) 457-2212

Yes! I want to support the Maya Educational Foundation projects

Enclosed is my check payable to Maya Educational Foundation in the amount of US\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please charge my \_\_\_\_\_ MasterCard \_\_\_\_\_ VISA in the amount of US\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Account No. \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Cardholder's name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

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Street / P.O. Box, City, State, Zip, Country

☐ I am considering a bequest to MEF. Please contact me.