



# Maya Educational Foundation

Providing educational opportunities

2013-2014 Report



K'iche' Maya student from San Miguel Uspantán, Quiché with her parents after graduating *Cum Laude* as an Auditor and Public Accountant, 2013.

The Maya Educational Foundation (MEF) supports the educational and professional advancement of the Maya people in Guatemala, southern Mexico and Belize, with special consideration given to women and girls, and to indigenous groups from remote areas.

## Contents

President's Letter	2
MEF's Core Work - University Scholarships	3
Esperanza Juvenil	6
Maya Traditions	6
Tz'utujil Scholarships	7
Cajolá Scholarships	7
Livingston Scholarship Program	8
Chuj Scholarship Program	8
Chenalhó Scholarships	8
Todos Santos Scholarships	9
Colegio Bilingüe Intercultural Paxil	9
Entre Ríos Scholarships	10
Oxlajuj B'atz'	10
Amigos de San Cristóbal	10
English Language Programs	11
How You Can Help	12
Your Donations at Work	12



FEPMaya student from Sololá  
graduating as a *licenciado* in history

For information on all our  
projects and more photos,  
please visit our website  
[www.mayaedufound.org](http://www.mayaedufound.org)

Dear Friends,

For twenty-one years the Maya Educational Foundation has been helping young Maya people in Guatemala, Belize, and Chiapas, Mexico achieve their dream of an education. After another successful year of growth and reflection, we feel stronger than ever, due in large part to the generosity of you, our donors.

I'd like to take this opportunity to tell you why I feel so passionate about the work we do and what makes the Maya Educational Foundation different from other educational foundations whose fundraising letters you receive. Our foundation stands out in its commitment to assist Maya youth in pursuing an education through scholarship programs created and administered largely by our Maya colleagues in the nations where we work. In partnering with them we are assured that students receive support and inspiration from people who value their languages and cultures. These individuals also model how to deal with racism and other forms of discrimination that are still all too common in their societies.

The success of our foundation is best seen in the achievements of our students. Some of their accomplishments are truly remarkable and have improved the welfare of entire nations. For example, we just learned that former MEF scholarship recipient Miguel Angel Cuj Pastor is working on a project that has won an award in Guatemala for developing a nutritional supplement that has improved the health and nutrition of children 6-36 months, a critical stage for brain development (see page 5). Our heartfelt congratulations to Miguel and his colleagues.

The past year MEF's Board of Directors welcomed two new members, Laura McClusky and Rachel McCleary. The Board carefully considered how to best advance MEF's mission which, from its inception, has been to help Maya youth attend university. We recognize the importance of education for younger Maya students and are committed to maintaining our current partnerships that support primary and secondary school programs.

Nevertheless, the MEF Board is also aware that despite our successes, far too many Maya students with excellent academic qualifications are still unable to receive a university education, simply because they lack financial resources. To help ensure that more of these students can advance in their education and better serve their communities, beginning in 2014 we will undertake a new fundraising effort to greatly increase the number of our university scholarships. We are confident that with your help, and the help of so many others who share our goals, the years ahead will bring us many more examples of the inspiring accomplishments of these extraordinary young women and men.

It is difficult to find the words to express our gratitude to you for your continuing support. Without your contributions—large and small—we would not exist, and hundreds of deserving young Maya people would not be able to attend school. In this report you will read excerpts from letters we received this past year from scholarship recipients. We hope that you will feel as rewarded and inspired by their words as we do and that we can count on your support again to help these students and many others fulfill their goals.

With warmest regards and best wishes for the coming year,

Christine Eber, MEF Board President

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## MEF's Core Work - University Scholarships

MEF's main goal has been to provide Maya students with scholarship opportunities to make it possible for them to attend universities in Guatemala, Mexico and Belize. For a fraction of what it would cost to educate one student in the U.S., MEF can help many students achieve a university education in their home countries. Supporting students at the university level has borne many fruits, including the new cadre of graduates each year who bring much-needed skills and knowledge to their communities, as well as the example they set for other young people of a viable alternative to joining the migrant stream to the

U.S. MEF is proud to do its part to assist many young people and their families to move out of poverty and live dignified lives in their home countries.

MEF's work is possible through partnerships with non-profit organizations in Mexico, Guatemala and Belize. These organizations share our values and many of our goals. We are deeply grateful for the invaluable supervision and moral and logistical support they provide to the students.

We continue below with brief reports on most MEF programs, beginning with our major partners.

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### In Guatemala

MEF established its first scholarship program for Maya students, the Programa de Becas Mayas, in Guatemala City in 1992. In 2003 the program became its own non-profit organization, la Fundación para Estudios y Profesionalización Maya (FEPMaya). In 2014 FEPMaya will assist 47 university students, up from 37 in 2013. Recognizing the need to support students who can only study on weekends, FEPMaya will award five weekend scholarships beginning in 2014. To date, over 100 students have graduated with professional degrees through support from FEPMaya and MEF!



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### In Mexico

Two strong NGOs and long-time MEF partners, La FOMMA (Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya), a women's theater company, and Sna Jtz'ibajom (House of the Writer), a writers' group, work with most of MEF's university scholars in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, with each of them currently



MEF visits with Sna Jtz'ibajom students, March 2013.

supervising twenty students. During a visit to Chiapas in March 2013, MEF Director and Board President met with students in both programs and were deeply impressed by their commitment to surmount the obstacles to obtain a university education, including racial and gender discrimination. La FOMMA and Sna Jtz'ibajom provide safe havens for the students and a space to meet with other Maya students who share similar challenges. In our meeting with the students they expressed pride in their Mayan languages and cultural heritages. We were also im-



MEF visits with FOMMA students, March 2013.

pressed with the service component of both programs. Students provide service in a variety of ways, including teaching younger students or assisting in workshops to help Maya adults learn to read and write in their native languages.

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## In Belize

MEF is proud to collaborate in Belize with the Julian Cho Society in Punta Gorda in the Toledo District. Scholarship supervisor Faustina Pop reports on the twelve students' progress this year:

"The MEF Scholarship Program is resulting in a steady increase of graduates from High School in rural Toledo. This year we are glad to report that seven of our twelve scholars have graduated from high school; two of our post-secondary students are completing their summer internships and will graduate from the University of Belize; two of our remaining scholars are promoted and only one scholar has dropped out. For a small community where poverty is high in terms of cash flow within the Maya communities, we find reason to be encouraged at the success of this program. Many families have benefited through the support we provide and by extension the Toledo District and the country stands to benefit from an increase in human resources."

Augustine Sam received a high school diploma. He comes from a rural Maya community still without electricity and many socioeconomic challenges which make education difficult to access, 2013.



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## Growing Trend and Challenge

You will notice throughout this report that a number of our partners are facing an increasing demand to assist students who are ready and eager to attend university. For example, Grupo Cajolá in Cajolá, Guatemala, is responding to that need and has shifted from supporting middle and high school students to only university students. Maya Traditions in Panajachel, Guatemala will award as many as 10 university scholarships in 2014. Even in rural areas far from city centers, most MEF partners are showing the same encouraging trend, which also includes an increase in the number of girls ready for university. These changes reflect the great need and wish expressed by Maya students and their parents for children to have a better future and for Maya professionals to have a voice in their nations and an opportunity to make a positive impact.

## Former Students' Accomplishments

**Miguel Cuj Pastor**, a former FEPMaya student, graduated in 2011 with a *licenciatura* degree in nutrition. Since 2010 he has been working as research coordinator with INCAP (Instituto de Nutrición de Centroamérica y Panamá) on a project called Maní+ which was founded in 2008 by Vanderbilt professor Edward Fischer. Maní+ is about the development of a nutritional supplement to combat malnutrition in Guatemala's poorest communities. Guatemala has the highest chronic malnutrition index in Latin America (2009, UNICEF). Miguel reports that the implementation of Maní+ has been very successful and that Maní+ was recently nominated for a 2014 Harvesting Nutrition award for fighting malnutrition in Guatemala and that it was also awarded a "Premio Nacional de Innovación 2013 de Guatemala". He says that his personal success is in part due to the MEF and writes: "I can now give some of my knowledge to support Maya communities. Thank you for your vision at MEF." Our congratulations and best wishes to Miguel, and also to Edward Fischer! For more information, visit [www.manipulus.org](http://www.manipulus.org).



From left to right: Miguel Angel Cuj Pastor (Maní+ Director of Nutrition Research), María José Arenales de Gallardo (Director of Maní+), Edward Fischer (Founder of Maní+), Raxché Rodríguez (Director of Education for of Maní+), and Steve Moore (Founder of the Shalom Foundation and Maní+ Partner), 2013.

**Francisco Miguel Tavico Reynoso**, a former FEPMaya student, graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications and now works as a social communicator in national and international social organizations. He has participated in investigations on discrimination and racism via methods of communication. He teaches the course Strategies of Linguistic Communication and Alternative Communication at the university level.

Together with Bright Star Philanthropy Partners who funded the project, he compiled and recently published *El Tiempo que se nos fue* (*The Time that Got Away from Us*), an anthology of Maya legends and stories from the regions of Sololá, Alta Verapaz, and Quiché. See more on this at [www.mediamayaonline.com](http://www.mediamayaonline.com).

### Consider donating to MEF in honor of a special person!

Many MEF donors dedicate their donation to a person they want to honor, for example, on the occasion of a person's birthday, anniversary, or in memory of their passing. MEF Board President, Christine Eber, sent us her reaction to a donation that was recently made in her honor:

"I will never forget the day I learned that a former student made a monthly donation to MEF in my honor. When I wrote Danielle Deemer to thank her for this honor she wrote me back saying, 'I had been receiving the MEF newsletter for a couple of years, but was unable to contribute due to living in graduate school penury, and accumulating some debt because of it. But now I'm happy I have some extra money to contribute to my favorite organizations! I thought it was only fitting that I use my first paycheck as a professor to recognize you!'"

## Esperanza Juvenil

MEF's partner since 2007, Esperanza Juvenil (Boys Hope Girls Hope) in Guatemala City provides children with caring, family-like homes, opportunities to discover and develop their talents, and a 21st century education. Esperanza Juvenil's commitment to the 120 youths it now serves includes support through university and the students' transition to independent living. Its mission is "to help academically capable and motivated children-in-need to meet their full potential" and to care about others. The children come from all parts of Guatemala, from impoverished backgrounds and from families that suffer from extreme distress and cannot meet their basic needs. The children's lives have been marked by abuse, alcoholism, intra-family and community violence. A third of the students speak Spanish as a second language; their first languages include the Mayan languages Mam, Tz'utujil, K'iche' and Kaqchikel. MEF currently provides 18 scholarships for Maya students who live in the Esperanza Juvenil homes and study at the Esperanza Juvenil Educational Center during their elementary and middle school years. After middle school, the scholars attend top

private high schools in Guatemala City and then go on to university. This year, Deisy, one of the MEF scholars at Esperanza Juvenil, is attending university, with another girl to follow in 2014.



Esperanza Juvenil's Director shares with us: "Deisy is studying psychology at the Landívar University, and loves her life as a university student. She has formed a very strong group of supportive friends. She works for a bakery and has always been interested in developing a career that involves cooking. She is also the leader of her church's youth group, and she often approaches the Esperanza Juvenil staff for advice on how to motivate the youth. It is a joy to see her blossoming as an independent adult with a clear sense of purpose and drive."

## Maya Traditions / Fundación Tradiciones Mayas

Located in Panajachel is MEF partner Maya Traditions, a non-profit that has grown out of the efforts of the late Jane Mintz, a social worker and weaver who began in the 1990s to help Mayan weavers in the Lake Atitlán region of Guatemala. Jane's work evolved to include programs focused on education, health and artisan training. Today Maya Traditions holds instructional workshops in public health, which incorporate traditional Maya medicine

and practices. MEF supports Maya Traditions in its educational work and its scholarship program which has recently seen its first university students. Maya Traditions has granted scholarships to over 2,200 children of the artisans it works with. It is currently helping 91 students. Maya Traditions' staff make regular visits to students' homes and require them to perform social service during their vacations.



Children receiving scholarships from Maya Traditions, 2013.

## Tz'utujil Scholarships

In 2013 Maya Traditions agreed to take on the supervision of the Ben and Lois Paul scholarships for Tz'utujil Maya students in the Departments of Suchitepéquez and Sololá, Guatemala. We thank them for this service. We also want to thank Ajpub' Pablo García Ixmata' for helping MEF to establish and administer this program in memory and honor of the renowned anthropologist Ben Paul and his wife, Lois, following Ben's death in 2005. The program continues to support seven Tz'utujil students from very poor families. One of them, María Sol Choy, will be the first to move on to university in 2014.

María Sol and her parents  
at her graduation from *diversificado*, 2013.



## Cajolá Scholarships

MEF partner Grupo Cajolá in Cajolá, Guatemala has restructured its scholarship program to focus on university students beginning in 2014, in response to the great need for trained professionals in this Mam Maya community. In 2014 the program will boast nine university students. One of them, Walfre Molina, is in the middle of his internship to become a physician and is responsible for health and nutrition at the Cajolá preschool. Walfre trains the teachers and the parents in good health and nutrition practices, along with monitoring the children's weight and overall health. Caryn Maxim, program supervisor, writes that more than 66% of the children of Cajolá experience chronic malnutrition, making health and nutrition priorities.



Scholarship students in Cajolá (Walfre third from left), 2013.

"My great wish is to graduate as a medical doctor and be able to work and help the people that most need it. I have witnessed that poor people have a higher incidence of illness and death from health problems that could have been treated if they had had access to health care... For my part I am putting all my determination and my efforts into achieving my goal and thus be able to say that in a short time Cajolá will have a professional who is going to work for the development of our town and our country."

– Walfre Molina

## Livingston Scholarship Program

In Livingston, Guatemala, MEF partners with Asociación de Amigos para el Desarrollo de Livingston. The program supervisors inform us that several of the MEF scholars are now moving on to university level. In 2014, five students will be in university and five in high school. They write, “It has been five years since we started receiving your generous donations to sponsor a scholarship program here, aimed to support identified good students from the Garífuna and the Maya Q’eqchi’ ethnic groups who without this help would have to abandon their studies due to a lack of economic resources in their homes.”

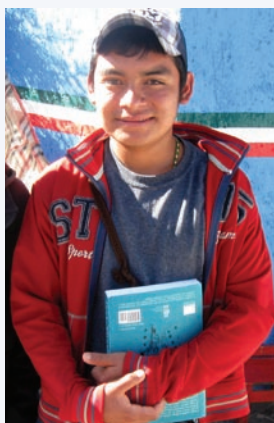
Livingston students and supervisors, 2013.



## Chuj Scholarship Program

Productores Alternativos de La Selva (PAS) is a coffee cooperative in the Lagos de Montebello region of Chiapas, Mexico close to Guatemala, which has its roots in the efforts of Chuj Maya refugees to create a new life in Mexico after leaving Guatemala during the violence of the 1980s. An important goal of the cooperative is to help Chuj young people obtain an education while still honoring their language and culture and serving their communities. This past spring we had the privilege to meet with the eight current MEF scholars (five in high school and three in university) in their community of Tziscaco. One of the students, Kixtup, a university student studying at the Intercultural University in San Cristóbal, told us about his efforts to keep his language and culture alive and later sent us a greeting updating us on his progress.

“I’m currently preparing the research protocol for my thesis with the help of the program supervisor, who, together with the PAS cooperative and, of course, my parents and family have supported me with good advice to practice the *junk’olal* (peace, love, dignity, community) with each and every person who is part of my learning and community environments. The topic I will address in my thesis deals with the study of the cultural knowledge of the Chuj people.” – Kixtup



## Chenalhó Scholarships

The Chenalhó scholarship program in the highlands of Chiapas, was established in 2009 in memory of Linnea and Woodrow Eber, educators and parents of Board President Christine Eber. The program sponsors six high school scholarships for Tzotzil-speaking Maya young people. We are pleased to report that in Fall 2013 the first two graduates enrolled in university in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Also, three young women were among the scholarship recipients in 2013, a major accomplishment in a township where most young women do not continue their education past middle school. One of MEF’s goals in establishing this program was to help more girls go as far in school as they can.



Students in San Pedro Chenalhó, 2013.

## Todos Santos Scholarships

In Todos Santos, in the western highlands of Guatemala, MEF supports students of various ages, with help from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation and the Shelton H. Davis Scholarship Fund. In 2010 the family of Shelton Davis established this fund in his memory. This past year, Shelton's wife, Mary Gubbins, and his children, Peter and Rebecca Davis, went to Todos Santos and visited with supervisor Felipa Jiménez and all of the 19 MEF students and their parents. The parents told them how essential the scholarship support is to them and the children shared what they want to be when they grow up and their dreams of going on to university. The Davis family assured the five students supported by the Shelton H. Davis Fund —Adelia Marimar, Brenda, Iris Albina, Lorenzo, and Carmelina— of their commitment to fund them through their college years. The Davis family writes:

“The trip renewed our confidence in the significance and effectiveness of the Maya Educational Foundation and the Shelton H. Davis Scholarship Fund. Sandy used to have a phrase when he worked on development issues at the World Bank: ‘Development is a conversation.’ He spent his whole life fighting for indigenous communities to have a seat at the table in those conversations. We are happy to continue this legacy in a small way by supporting the empowering efforts of the Maya Educational Foundation.”



Photo by Rebecca Davis

## Colegio Bilingüe Intercultural Paxil

Colegio Paxil, a private middle school, in Nebaj, Quiché, Guatemala, increased its number of students from 73 to 94 in 2013. Most are Ixil Mayas, but the program also includes ten Ladino students and six K'iche' Maya students, who have learned the Ixil language and culture. Colegio Paxil leaders trust that this new generation's involvement in intercultural activities will help combat racism in the future. The school continues to charge a symbolic tuition to those students who are able to afford it. That income in 2013 represented about a third of the funds needed to operate; the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation and MEF provided the remainder. The school offers a welcoming place for both students and their families who want to maintain their language and traditions. Due to extreme poverty in the region, MEF's support is essential to the school's survival.



Lilia Catarina, 16, in 3rd grade *básico*, is a student at Colegio Paxil. She writes: “My parents have very little money and are not able to pay for our education. We are six children, my father is a farmer and my Mom stays at home with my siblings. They don't have any income. I travel from my community to Nebaj on Mondays where I stay with relatives and come back home on Fridays. My dream is to continue to study to become an accountant, and then go to university and graduate with a professional degree and help my country.

I am grateful to be at Colegio Paxil because it's the only school that practices our Ixil customs and culture.

## Entre Ríos Scholarships

In the remote Entre Ríos area in Petén, Guatemala, the Asociación de Docentes en Acción Educativa Rural (DARE) supervises students who receive support through a grant made to MEF by the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation. Currently the program includes six students in university and five in high school, as well as partial funding for two teacher salaries. The association is working hard to improve access to education in this underserved region and has already achieved its goal of establishing a middle school, but is still waiting for government approval for a high school. Consequently, students have to travel long distances to attend high school or university. We are impressed with the efforts and dedication shown by the association, the teachers, and the students.



Social work student accompanying school children.

## Oxlajuj B'atz' (Thirteen Threads)

Oxlajuj B'atz' (Thirteen Threads) in Panajachel, Guatemala is a women's empowerment organization that serves over 300 indigenous women weavers and artisans by bringing informal education in the form of workshops to their communities. The women, often illiterate and monolingual in a Mayan language, acquire new skills and knowledge in areas such as health, artisan production, small business management, and democratic group functioning. Informal educational projects such as those provided by Oxlajuj B'atz' give indigenous women in rural areas with scarce access to formal education the opportunity to develop themselves. To women who are often the only breadwinners in their families, Oxlajuj B'atz' brings hope and encouragement, new skills to make new or better products, and health information that can save lives.

Oxlajuj B'atz' and MEF, with generous funding received from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation, have facilitated efforts of the Cooperativa Cotzal, in San Juan Cotzal, Quiché, to create a weavers' center where the mostly widowed weavers will teach their art to local children and adults, some of the elderly widows will find a home, and tourists are invited to visit, purchase weavings, and take courses.



Dining for Women delegation visit to Oxlajuj B'atz', October 2013.

## Amigos de San Cristóbal

Long-time MEF partner Amigos' mission is to improve the health, education, economic well-being and self sufficiency of the disadvantaged people of Chiapas. Funding this year is going to projects such as Chantiik, an educational program for youth who do not attend school and are in need of skills that will lead to a better future. The organization trains youth for jobs in the tourist industry, including cooking, baking and waiting tables in addition to skills in literacy, English, and computer skills. Life skills workshops include topics like teamwork, gender equality, street risks prevention, mutual respect, and self-esteem.



Bakers in training at Chantiik, 2013.

## English Language Programs

The two English Language Programs (ELP), one in La Antigua, Guatemala, the other in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, are created and carried out by volunteers, with administrative and financial support from MEF, as needed. A small but strong volunteer group is currently preparing for the next ELP-Guatemala stint in Antigua in December 2013. The team of six volunteers will be teaching 23 university students, most of them from FEPMaya. The two-week intensive English course will include instruction and conversation, which the students say they need the most. Again this year, Laurie Levinger and Lianne Moccia are the group leaders. Our thanks to them and to all of this year's participants! Volunteer Gretchen Miller had this to say about her experience in 2012:

"We were first-time teachers in the Antigua English Language Program last December. We anticipated a positive experience, and it was better than we could have hoped. The students were a delight: smart, enthusiastic, hard-working, articulate and talented... We had two weeks of exposure to the very finest in young Maya culture. At talent show night, we were offered instrumental and vocal music, bi-lingual skits, and a first-rate feminist drama. ...The students had time each afternoon to get to know each other and the entire session was full of examples of Maya Pride... We want to thank FEPMaya and the students for making this deep and personal experience possible for us."



It is a bittersweet moment for MEF to have to say goodbye to long-time Chiapas ELP volunteer Steve Homer. For many years Steve volunteered his expertise as an ESL teacher and mentor to university students in Chiapas. Steve recruited other volunteers, like Marcia Siegel and Ranita Størseth, to whom we are also very grateful.



The students in the ELP programs are learning a great deal from volunteers like Steve and have expressed their appreciation for these extra efforts in many letters to the volunteers and MEF.

*Steve, we hope you know how much you have  
achieved over the years for the students and  
how much gratitude we feel towards you.  
We will miss you very much.*

**THANK YOU!**

"My sincerest thanks to MEF and FEPMaya for the financial and moral support they have given me during my university studies which would have been impossible for me to pursue otherwise. FEPMaya held me up and gave me strength and a helping hand in my darkest hour ... As with all endings and new beginnings, I am filled with both joy and a bit of sadness, for FEPMaya has become my family. I will be happy to serve this admirable organization in the future."

—Sheily Dora Coyoy Velásquez (see front page)

Manuel León, a former MEF scholar, produced a short video with testimonials from past and current students who have received scholarships through FEPMaya in Guatemala. The film can be viewed at

[www.mayaedufound.org](http://www.mayaedufound.org)

## How You Can Help

There are several ways you can help the Maya Educational Foundation:

- ✓ by sponsoring an event in your community to make people aware of 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 asking family and friends to make a donation to MEF in your honor

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

## Your Donations at Work

- \$ 190 supports the education of a university student for one month.
- \$ 95 supports a student in high school for one month.
- \$ 50 supports a student in middle school for one month.
- \$ 30 helps parents send a child to elementary school for one month.
- \$ 50 covers the cost of teaching an individual how to read and write his or her native language in six months.

Any amount helps Maya students with their education and provides workshops and vocational training to women and whole communities.

Your donation to MEF will help change lives.

## Maya Educational Foundation

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