

Maya Educational Foundation

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www.mayaedufound.org

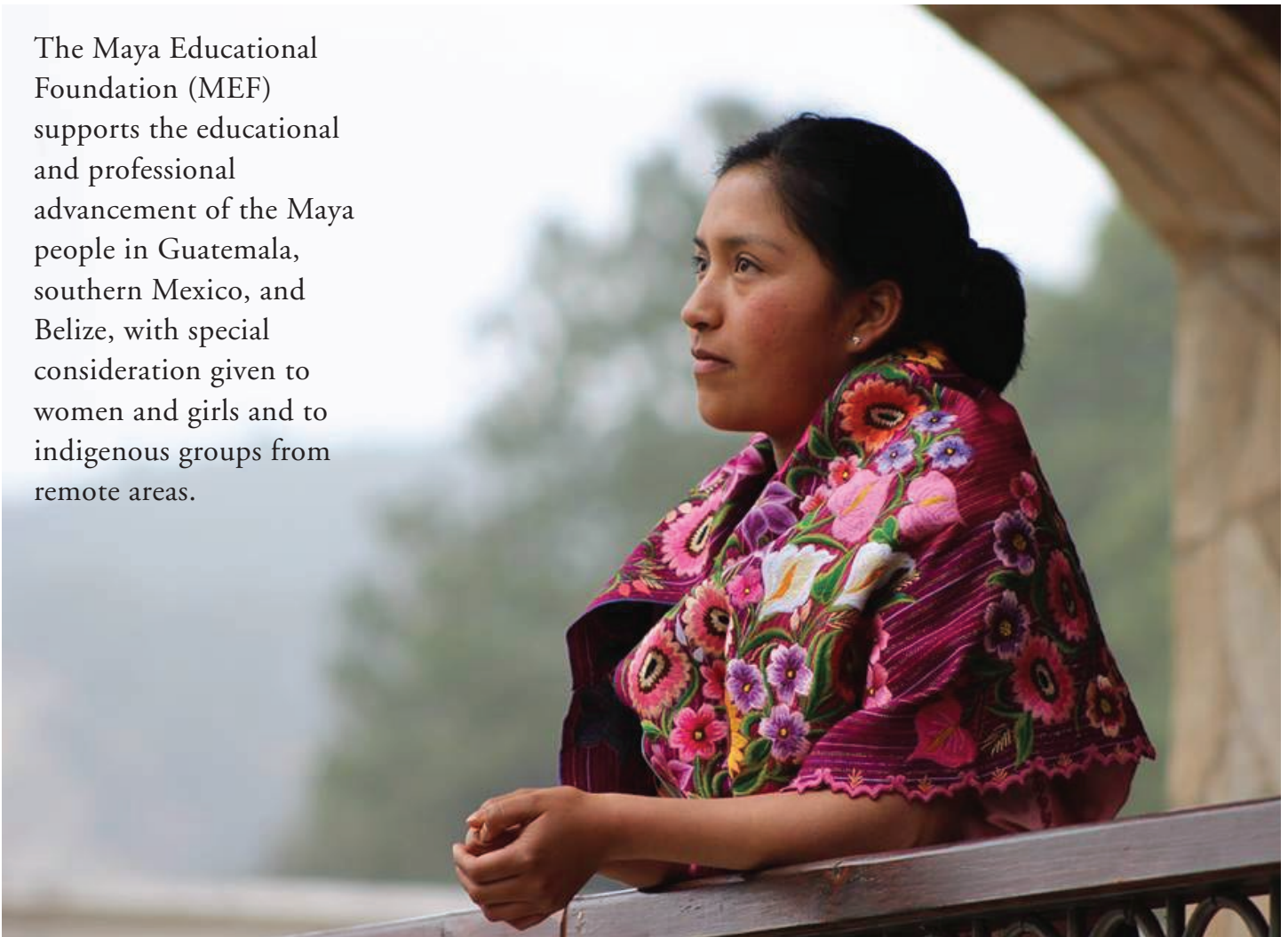


Maya Educational Foundation

Providing educational opportunities

2014-2015 Report

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.



Laura Patricia, a Tzotzil Maya university student from Chiapas, Mexico, is pursuing her dream to become a professional reporter.

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Entre Ríos student
graduating as a social worker.

For information on all our
projects and more photos,
please visit our website
www.mayaedufound.org

Dear Friends,

As I write this annual letter, fall has come to the New Mexico town where I live. Chili peppers are roasting, pecan trees are turning gold, and flocks of birds are migrating south. While I marvel at the migration of birds and other natural wonders, it is impossible to forget another migration that follows no season—that of people from Mexico and Central America crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. Many of the families that crossed the border this past summer came from Guatemala, the country where the majority of Maya Educational Foundation scholarship students live. Some of the women and children who arrived in my town of Las Cruces, just 35 miles from the border, were Maya, like our students. I was privileged to participate in a volunteer project that provided shelter and assistance to these people. I heard their stories of grinding poverty and violence suffered at the hands of gangs, police, and security forces and understood why they were seeking refuge in the U.S.

When the founders of the Maya Educational Foundation (MEF) began to seek funding for Maya students in Guatemala in the late 1980s, they couldn't have foreseen the exodus of young people from Mexico and Central America that began a decade later due in large part to the suffering and violence unleashed by failed economic and political policies. But MEF's founders did foresee the great importance to Guatemala of its Maya population, especially the young Maya men and women hungering for an education and a chance to have a voice in their nation's future.

For 23 years, since MEF's founding in 1992, our scholarship programs have enabled hundreds of students to study in their home countries, obtain meaningful work after graduating, and give something of value back to their families and communities, rather than having to migrate to the U.S. in search of work. The importance of MEF's scholarship support to students, their communities, and nations cannot be underestimated. It reverberates throughout their societies and the world.

I am tremendously inspired by our Maya students and partners in Guatemala, Belize, and Chiapas, Mexico. Their hard work and sacrifice over the years has been a beacon of light in an often dark world. This newsletter provides snapshots of some of our students' accomplishments and the obstacles they have overcome. We hope that the following pages bring you closer to these students and the people and programs that nurture, inspire, and protect them.

We thank you for your past support and hope that we can count on you again this year. Your contributions make all the difference to our students, who give us hope for the world.

With warmest regards and best wishes for the coming year,

Christine Eber, MEF Board President

Board notes:

At our July 2014 meeting, the MEF Board wished Godspeed to Bob Greenberg who retired from his position as Board Treasurer. Bob and his wife Jane have contributed to MEF in countless ways over the years. Thank you!

We are also grateful that John Farrow was able to return to the board this year and delighted to welcome to the board, our new treasurer, José Ursúa.

Core Work - University Scholarships in Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize

MEF's work on behalf of young Maya people in Guatemala, Belize, and Chiapas, Mexico is made possible through partnerships with non-profit organizations in these countries. We share with our partners the mission to enhance educational opportunities as a means to enable youth to move out of poverty and social marginalization. Although we recognize the vital importance of education for younger students and remain committed to supporting programs for them, we are concerned about the increasing number of students who complete secondary school with excellent academic qualifications, but are unable to continue on to university due to lack of funds.

Last year MEF announced a campaign to increase the number of university scholarships we endow. We are pleased to report that, due to your support and some

investment gains, we were able to accept more university students this year, now serving a total of 158, all of whom came to us through our program partners who guided them to this point. We are also pleased to announce a new partnership with Starfish, a non-profit that helps indigenous girls in Guatemala achieve their full potential. Starfish has donated funds for two young women to attend university in 2015 and for two more in 2016.

However, with applications at record levels, we are far from meeting the demand. We hope we can count on your support to be able to offer more scholarships in the coming years. The following pages will update you on some of our partners, programs, and students. For more information, please see our website: www.mayaedufound.org.

In Guatemala

Our oldest program partner FEPMaya (Fundación para Estudios y Profesionalización Maya) in Mixco, Guatemala, is currently supervising 50 university students. During a recent visit we were once again reminded of what makes this organization so remarkable. The students not only benefit from expert supervision and from supplementary programs (*educación paralela*), but also from regular contact with their fellow students. Through the network they have created students study together, tutor one another, and provide emotional and moral support.

Meet some of the current students:



Leonardo studies archaeology and calls FEPMaya “a fundamental pillar” for him, where he benefits from the parallel education and from sharing his views and experiences with the other students.



José Luis plans on serving the Maya communities of Guatemala after he finishes his medical studies.



Dominga studies sociolinguistics and is impressed with how many of the 21 Mayan languages are represented in FEPMaya's student body: K'iche', Kaqchikel, Achi, Popti', Chuj, and Tz'utujil, to name a few.



Santos is one of six children is studying medicine. His father abandoned the family when he was young. He has four more years of studies to become a cardiologist.

In Mexico

Our main scholarship program partners in Chiapas, Mexico are La FOMMA (Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya/Strength of the Maya Woman) and Sna Jtz'ibajom (House of the Writer), two long-standing and well-respected writer/theater groups in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Each organization monitors 20 university scholarship students. Like FEPMaya in Guatemala, they provide supervision, gathering space, and mentoring to the students who, in turn, give back to the organizations by doing some type of community service.

La FOMMA marked its 20th anniversary this year, a milestone for these formidable women playwrights and social activists. In addition to scholarship supervision and theater, La FOMMA also offers skills training workshops to young and adult indigenous people (e.g., baking, sewing, computer literacy, and Spanish language courses). Sna Jtz'ibajom publishes books and plays as well as provides workshops in Mayan languages in rural communities where people are eager to learn to read and write in their native languages.



Sna Jtz'ibajom students.

Meet some of the MEF scholarship students at Sna and La FOMMA:



Prior to receiving a MEF scholarship, **Enrique** could only dream of becoming a surgeon. He is now in his 8th semester. He says that there are many students who desire to study medicine in a nation that badly needs more physicians.



Angel de Jesús is an engineering student. He thanks MEF and its donors for helping him overcome many obstacles to pursue his goal of becoming a computer systems engineer.



Teresa studies management and development. She thanks MEF for its support and wishes that more young people could benefit from a scholarship. (See also page 11.)



Raymundo is in his fifth semester of studying visual arts. He is an accomplished painter and has had several shows already.

This support has allowed me to continue my university studies. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to cover my expenses. Thanks to the scholarship I can pay for transportation and rent. Also, the career I'm studying requires not only many outings to the field to practice but also to be informed of all daily events, which makes it imperative that I buy the newspapers and pay for a couple of hours of Internet connection every day in order to keep up with the news.

Laura Patricia, journalism student
(featured on the cover)

In Belize

In June, MEF Board member Laura McClusky and her partner Michael Niman visited the Julian Cho Society, MEF's scholarship partner in Belize. This non-profit is located in Punta Gorda in the Toledo District, the least developed southern-most part of Belize where the great majority of Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya live.



Photo by Michael Niman

Julian Cho Society students.

Each meeting was overflowing with parents and students wanting to hear more about MEF scholarships. Ten high school and two university students are currently receiving MEF support, with many more applying for aid. Director Cristina Coc stated that, with additional funding and more administrative help, they would be able to accept more students.



Photo by Michael Niman

Meeting with parents.

English Language Program-Guatemala Ten Years in the Field and Going Strong – Congratulations!

The first MEF English Language Program began in Antigua, Guatemala at the end of 2004. For ten years our enthusiastic English language volunteers have enriched the lives and learning environment of the FEP Maya students who participate in the two-week courses. The volunteers organize and recruit other volunteers in the U.S. and prepare the teaching materials. During their time together, students and teachers work in small groups and one-on-one. They also add extra-curricular activities to the courses which provide an added dimension to the more traditional classes. This year, on the 10th anniversary of the program, we recognize and thank Bob and Jane Greenberg who, in coordination with former MEF Director Armando Alfonzo, created the program and recruited and led the volunteers for five years. Laurie

Levinger took over leadership of the program in 2009 and now Lianne Moccia coordinates the program. A special shout-out to these dedicated and hard-working group leaders and a big "Thank you!" to all our formidable English Language Program volunteers past and present.



English Language Program, Guatemala, 2013.

In Memoriam – Flavia Derossi Robinson

A personal remembrance by Elisabeth Nicholson, Executive Director of MEF

It is with great sadness that we report the passing on September 8, 2014 of Flavia Derossi Robinson, a wonderful woman and great philanthropist.

Flavia was the founder of the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation which started its work in 1991 and focused on helping indigenous people in Latin America, later concentrating especially on supporting projects for women and children in Mayan communities in Guatemala.

When I first met with Flavia and her husband Marshall Robinson in 1998 in New York City, they showed sincere interest in MEF's mission and in working towards a long-term relationship between our two organizations in order to be able to make a real difference in the lives of indigenous people in Mexico and Guatemala, especially for women and girls. It turned out to be a good match and the start of a long and excellent relationship.

In the years that followed, even after Marshall's death in 2006, Flavia kept in touch and also came on several site visits with us, not shying away from even the most strenuous parts of the trips until late in her life.



Together with her nephew Daniele Derossi, now President of their foundation, Flavia inspired us to take on new projects, such as working with the women weavers of the Cooperativa Cotzal and the Entre Ríos students in Petén, an area where not even a middle school existed until she helped to build one. Without Flavia and her foundation's support, MEF could not have given as many scholarships to students in Guatemala or offered as many workshops to women weavers in Panajachel and surrounding areas.

Flavia exemplified what it means to be truly good. She made the world a better place for many. She saw poverty, sickness, racism, and injustice and did something about it, with true engagement, involvement, and support that mattered in places that she selected thoughtfully and carefully.

We will honor Flavia and her life's work by staying the course and continuing to fight for better opportunities for Maya students so they can reach their educational goals, and for rural women to receive better training and expand their knowledge bases to improve their lives.

Rest in peace, dear friend! We will never forget you.

Entre Ríos Scholarships

Asociación DARE (Docentes en Acción Educativa Rural) was established by former Guatemalan refugees who lived in camps in Mexico and returned in the mid-1990s to Guatemala, settling in the remote Entre Ríos region in Petén. They are determined to improve education for the young people in the area. The Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation helped this region with the creation of a middle school and, along with MEF, supports 11 students in high school and university. In a recent meeting with the group's leaders we learned about their continued efforts to establish a high school in this region. We also heard about families who find they have to sell their land to be able to send their children to school, especially at the high school and university levels.



Students from Instituto Mixto de Educación Básica por Cooperación "Flavia Robinson".

Maya Traditions

Fundación Tradiciones Mayas (Maya Traditions) in Panajachel, Guatemala, was founded by the late Jane Mintz in the 1990s. It has expanded gradually from a fair trade focus helping Maya women weavers to produce and market their products to also helping the weavers' children with their education and improving community health. MEF supports Maya Traditions' educational

work, which granted scholarship support to 107 children this year. Under its current leadership, Maya Traditions' new initiatives have shown great promise. One is the documentary film project *Unlocking Silent Histories* where students film daily life in their Maya communities. The public screenings of these student films have been very successful.



Maya Traditions weaver teaching her daughter.



Scholarship supervisor with a student.

Tz'utujil Scholarships

Maya Traditions supervises the Tz'utujil students in MEF's Ben and Lois Paul scholarship group, named for Ben and Lois Paul, anthropologists who were deeply revered by the San Pedro community. There are now seven students in this program.

We most recently accepted a woman in her twenties who is poised to start an accelerated course for high school and then plans to attend university. There is a huge need for these scholarships in the rural communities further away from Lake Atitlán.



Maya Traditions staff and MEF Board member meet with Tz'utujil students in Chicacao, Guatemala, 2014.

Amigos de Santa Cruz – A new partnership

MEF formed a new partnership this year with Amigos de Santa Cruz in Santa Cruz La Laguna, Guatemala. Founded in 1998, the mission of this energetic NGO is to help improve the lives of the indigenous people of Santa Cruz La Laguna and surrounding villages through support for education, better health, a cleaner environment, and sustainable economic development. This non-profit, founded and supported in large part by U.S. expatriates, concentrates its efforts on the rural communities that make up Santa Cruz La Laguna, a total population of about 6,000.

The organization only supports projects that the community proposes, such as the construction and

completion in 2010 of the CECAP (Centro de Capacitación) building where MEF staff visited Amigos Director Pat Torpie and colleagues this past spring. Located high above Lake Atitlán, the center provides vocational training, including sewing, carpentry, and welding. It also houses a computer lab, offices, and a beautiful restaurant, run by culinary students.

Currently, Amigos gives scholarship support to 30 students in high school (*diversificado*) programs and to 11 young adults in weekend university programs. All students also work and do community service. From supporting five university scholarships in 2014, MEF will raise that number to eight in 2015.



Culinary students at CECAP.



Estela at work at CECAP.

Amigos de San Cristóbal, Chiapas, Mexico

MEF has worked with Amigos de San Cristóbal since 2004. This active NGO seeks out and supports local projects that help to improve formal and informal education, health, and the living conditions of the poor in the area. Among others, they have given grants to Casa de Las Flores, a non-profit that provides a safe haven for children who work in the streets, to Chantiik, which provides vocational training (baking and computing and small-business skills) to young people not in regular schools, and to Hogar Comunitario, an educational program for pregnant mothers and their children. These projects are life-changing and Amigos de San Cristóbal consistently impresses us with its careful selection, follow-up, and support.



Esperanza Juvenil

Esperanza Juvenil (Boys Hope Girls Hope) was established in 1992 and has grown to serve 140 motivated children, many of them from difficult family backgrounds marked by hunger, poverty, neglect, and alcoholism. Since 2007, when MEF began partnering with Esperanza Juvenil, we have witnessed its careful expansion. Seventy-two children currently live in six Esperanza-maintained homes, each housing 12 children. Other students are day scholars and live elsewhere but come for the excellent education. Esperanza Juvenil has its own elementary and middle school with pupils hailing from all parts of Guatemala. Nearly half of the students speak Spanish as a second language. First languages include the Mayan languages Mam, Tz'utujil, Achi, K'iche', and Kakchiquel. MEF scholarship support goes to 18 Maya students.

Esperanza Juvenil provides a vibrant and productive learning environment to its students who share a passion for life and a strong motivation to learn. Students are safe and cared for and encouraged to achieve their very best. During our recent visit Directors Kristin Ostby and Lucas Pinzón stressed the importance of helping their

students become self-reliant, capable, and responsible human beings. Community service is expected of all students. A number of students have reached university level and have moved out of the Esperanza homes to live more independently. They receive some scholarship assistance, but also work part-time. These students live nearby, keep in regular contact, and tutor younger students. Furthermore, they can count on the moral and logistical support of Esperanza Juvenil's staff and the other students whenever they need it.

Esperanza Juvenil student
with Kristin Ostby.



Outreach to Todos Santos

MEF has provided scholarships in Todos Santos in Guatemala's western highlands since the 1990s. In recent years, with support from the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation and the Shelton H. Davis Fund, MEF has been able to support 20 students, from the primary school to university level. Poverty, malnutrition, and children's work obligations at home are some of the factors preventing children from attending schools for more than just a few years, especially in this region of Guatemala. Although some of the scholarship students do not continue

past primary school (six years), they would certainly have completed fewer grades without scholarship support. A primary school education teaches children to do math and read and write Spanish, important skills for broader participation in their communities. For example, two former MEF scholars have become shopkeepers in Todos Santos after graduating from primary school. These two girls are proud of what they have accomplished, while other students are making the leap to middle and high school and several students are now in university.



Photo by Rebecca Davis

Todos Santos student
with her mother and younger sister.

Other MEF outreach programs include the Chuj and San Pedro Chenalhó scholarships in Chiapas, and the scholarships for Grupo Cajolá, Livingston, Michbilrixpú, and Tzununá in Guatemala. MEF support also goes to Thirteen Threads/Oxlajuj B'atz' in Guatemala, benefiting educational workshops for artisan women in Maya communities. You can find more information on them at www.mayaedufound.org.

Other MEF Supported Projects:

Diálogos

Diálogos sobre Historia y Memoria en Comunidades Locales (Dialogues about the History and Memory of Local Communities) is a project of the Asociación Cultural Q'anil in Sacatepéquez, Guatemala to which MEF has given support since 2012. Renowned history scholars Edgar Esquit and Héctor Concoha Chet facilitate a series of workshops in Kaqchikel Maya communities which are focused on exploring local history through historical documents. Workshops enable community members—young and old—to interact with



Diálogos workshop participants in Comalapa.

copies of pre-colonial and colonial documents. Participants express excitement at reading and discussing these documents, including maps, land titles, parish registers, letters to the Crown, as well as marriage and death records.

Héctor reports that enthusiasm for learning about community history is spreading throughout Kaqchikel towns as a result of the workshops which are already well underway in Patzicía, San Juan Sacatepéquez, Comalapa, and Patzún, with Xenacoj and San Pedro to follow this year.

CIRMA

The renowned Center for Mesoamerican Research, CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica) in La Antigua, Guatemala receives support from MEF for its important mission of rescuing, preserving, and offering public access to the intellectual and cultural heritage of the region. It accomplishes this through its three major components: a Social Sciences Library, a Historical Archive, and a Photo Archive, all dealing with the region's past and present.

CIRMA reports that its new policy to admit visitors

by appointment only has not resulted in a reduction in the number of visitors who want to consult materials in any of the three CIRMA sections or who want to learn about the wealth of resources housed at CIRMA through guided tours.

After a short phase of restructuring at the end of last year, CIRMA is doing well and can celebrate 36 years of service to academics, researchers, students, and the general public, and move ahead with renewed strength and confidence.



Your Support Matters

The young people we meet when visiting MEF projects have a fervent desire to improve their lives. Working with scholarship students over the past 22 years, I have seen our scholars fulfill their dreams of becoming professionals in a variety of fields (over 175 university graduates and counting!). These achievements are driven not only by the students' passion to learn, but by the actions and hearts of the generous people who support these students, who otherwise would not be able to attend school.

With pride in our students and gratitude to our partners and to you, our donors, I want to share with you these final impressions from the field this year:

- In the Montebello region of Chiapas, the Chuj scholarship students, who themselves have very little, have started to contribute small amounts to an emergency fund to help other students in need.
- Grupo Cajolá leader Caryn Maxim reports that thanks to MEF's support, the program now has its first university graduate (in law). He is the first Maya with a professional degree in this Guatemalan community and is already helping his fellow townspeople.
- Felipa Jiménez, MEF scholarship supervisor in Todos Santos, reports that scholarships have helped children, especially boys, stay occupied and off the

streets where they could be easily drawn into one of the two gangs that exist there.

- Teresa, a MEF scholarship student in Chiapas, related to us how her parents kept telling her that a few years of elementary school were enough for a girl and that a future husband would not like a wife who was too educated. Despite their objections, she soldiered on. Teresa is studying at university now and is overjoyed to have come this far. To her surprise, her parents have become proud of her.
- FEPMaya Director, Roberto Morales Sic, writes that not one of the university students in the program in Guatemala has left the country or is thinking of emigrating since most of the program's graduates have found employment or have contract work.

The students, their parents, and their supervisors are most grateful to you, MEF's donors. During visits they ask us to bring to you their message of gratitude and blessings for your good health and that of your families. They hold you in their hearts. All of us at MEF are also very thankful for your generosity and hope you will find our work worthy of your support again this year.

Thank you!

Elisabeth Nicholson
MEF Executive Director



*One child, one teacher,
one pen, and one book
can change the world.*



Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai's words in a speech at the United Nations on July 12, 2013.

Student from
Colegio Bilingüe
Intercultural Paxil,
Nebaj, Guatemala.



How You Can Help

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

- ✓ by making a financial contribution
- ✓ by considering a bequest to MEF
- ✓ by asking family and friends to make a donation to MEF in your honor (birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, special occasions)
- ✓ by volunteering your time and expertise
- ✓ by making an in-kind contribution
- ✓ by exploring and utilizing employer matches to multiply your donations
- ✓ by spreading the word about our work and mission

Your Donations at Work

- \$ 200 supports the education of a university student for one month.
- \$ 100 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 weekend workshops teaching individuals how to read and write their native language.

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

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

Your donation to MEF will help change lives.

Maya Educational Foundation

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YES, I want to support the Maya Educational Foundation programs!

US\$ _____ Check enclosed payable to Maya Educational Foundation

US\$ _____ Charge to ☐ Master Card ☐ Visa ☐ Discover

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Expiration date _____ Security code (on the back) _____

Signature _____

Phone _____

Please send a receipt for this tax-deductible donation to:

Name/Organization _____ e-mail _____

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

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for _____ months
☐ Credit Card (MEF will charge your credit card monthly.
Minimum pledge of US\$10 required)

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