



# Maya Educational Foundation

Providing educational opportunities

## 2016-2017 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 students from remote areas.



MEF student Lisbeth Chuy Chalí with her family after graduating as a medical doctor, Guatemala, 2016

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Carol Hendrickson with  
ELP student and teacher



Pablo Chavajay with  
Maya Traditions' director  
and administrator

For information on our work,  
partners, and projects,  
please visit  
[www.mayaedufound.org](http://www.mayaedufound.org)  
and follow us on Facebook

Dear Friends,

Utz ta at k'oli [I hope you are well].

As a Tz'utujil Maya from Guatemala, whose first association with the Maya Educational Foundation (MEF) started 19 years ago as a grant recipient, I am honored to welcome you all now as the new MEF President.

With MEF's support of my dissertation, I completed my doctoral studies in developmental psychology at the University of California at Santa Cruz, where my masters and dissertation research focused on the roles of schooling in shaping attention management and the social organization of problem solving, respectively, among Mayan families of my hometown of San Pedro La Laguna, Guatemala. Since 2009, I have collaborated with others in different volunteer capacities to continue MEF's steadfast efforts to support a wide range of learning/teaching endeavors for Guatemalan, Mexican, and Belizean Maya of all ages in a variety of contexts.

My experience with MEF has provided me firsthand access to the unique and culturally attuned ways the organization supports Maya-initiated projects, helping recipients overcome obstacles and celebrating their achievements along the way. These projects meet the criteria of sustaining and promoting Maya cultural heritage, beliefs, languages, and practices, all-the-while expanding the awardees' repertoire of knowledge and skills to better prepare themselves, their families, and their communities to assume pivotal roles in shaping their lives in this ever-transforming world.

Building on my predecessors' hard work, I am committed to furthering MEF's goals of supporting the learning/teaching endeavors of underprivileged and marginalized Maya. One particular challenge I am especially dedicated to working on with others is addressing ways to strengthen the sustainability of MEF through expanding fundraising efforts. As a former MEF grant recipient and witness to the difference MEF's support makes and as a person who has a deep understanding of the challenges Maya encounter in their daily pursuits, I urge you to donate so that MEF may continue its invaluable work.

I also want to take the opportunity to express our Board members' and staff's gratitude to former President Carol Hendrickson for her devoted service over the years. We wish her much success as she resumes teaching at the MEF-sponsored English Language Program in Antigua, Guatemala. In addition, I would like to acknowledge anthropologist Laura McClusky, who has extensive experience working with Maya families and communities in Belize, as the new MEF Vice President. Finally, I welcome new Board member Jean-Marie Simon, a retired lawyer who consulted for Americas Watch and Amnesty International and has lived and worked in Guatemala.

In closing, I thank you for your support of the Maya Educational Foundation and look forward to leading the organization into its 25th year. Malt'yoox chi ewoneel [Thank you]!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Pablo Chavajay'.

Pablo Chavajay, Ph.D.  
MEF Board President



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## 2017: A Milestone for MEF

### 25 years of promoting educational opportunities for the Maya people

The vital support of our donors combined with the invaluable partnerships with trusted non-profits in Guatemala, Mexico and Belize are what make our work possible. Countless Maya students, groups, schools, and communities have benefitted from MEF grants over the last two and a half decades.

The lion's share of available MEF funding each year is dedicated to scholarship programs for Maya students. Other MEF support goes to a select few partners and projects actively involved in cultural and historical preservation and non-formal educational initiatives like indigenous language classes and skills training workshops in Chiapas and women weavers' workshops in Guatemala. Several one-time special grants went to three community libraries in Guatemala, a Maya radio station in Chiapas, and to the creation of a weavers' center in San Juan Cotzal and a high school in Entre Ríos, both in Guatemala. MEF periodically promotes the participation

of students in Maya workshops, cultural exchange visits, and the publication of Maya-relevant books.

Over the years hundreds of students have graduated with the help of MEF scholarships at the various school levels. How far the students advance depends on academics, economics, and culture. In rural areas we frequently see parents stop their academically gifted and well-performing children, especially their daughters, at básico/middle school or, at the latest, high school level, insisting that they have gone far enough in their education. This is slowly changing, with girls now declaring, with more confidence than ever before, that they want to continue to high school and beyond.

Catarina Lidia (below) is one such example. Presently attending Colegio Paxil, a middle school in Nebaj, Guatemala, she states that she is learning a lot there, but plans to continue her education to become a nurse.





## MEF Partners

### CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica)

One of our most important non-scholarship partners is CIRMA in Antigua, Guatemala. This 38-year-old institution holds an extensive library, as well as rich historical and photo archives and makes them accessible to all.

CIRMA has ongoing projects with local and foreign universities and hosts many visitors and volunteers. Whole school grades come and learn about CIRMA's significant library and archive holdings. This is an invaluable resource center for MEF students and anyone wanting to learn about the history and culture of the region.



Other MEF partners in Guatemala include FEPMaya (Fundación para Estudios y Profesionalización Maya), Esperanza Juvenil, Asociación DARE, Maya Traditions, Colegio Paxil, Grupo Cajolá, and more. In Chiapas, Mexico, we work with FOMMA (Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya) and Sna Jtz'ibajom (House of the Writer). Both these non-profits write and perform theater relevant to the Maya communities and beyond and offer various workshops and indigenous language classes in Maya communities. Amigos de San Cristóbal in Chiapas supports a number of educational and health related projects that serve its poor community members. In southern Belize we work with Julian Cho Society and Tumul K'in. We're proud to work with all these organizations and thank them for their work and help.

You will find information on all MEF partners at [www.mayaedufound.org](http://www.mayaedufound.org)

## Friends We Lost this Year



Our beloved former Board member and Board President **Marilyn Moors** passed away earlier this year. You will find our remembrance notes at [www.mayaedufound.org](http://www.mayaedufound.org)

We were very blessed to have her by and on our side for over twenty years, as an adviser, friend, supporter, and Board President. She was especially a promoter of education for indigenous women and girls in Guatemala. We miss her dearly!

In her honor MEF has established scholarships for weekend students with our partner FEPMaya in Guatemala. We thank all of you who donated to MEF in Marilyn's memory, especially our friends at the Guatemala Scholars Network for their special and generous contribution in Marilyn's memory.



We also mourn the passing of **Peter Butterfield** who gave his energy, expertise, and kindness by participating as a volunteer in the 2014 English Language Program in Antigua, Guatemala.

His wife Laurie Levin wrote us that Peter loved the Maya students he taught and that the ELP experience was a "treasured memory" for both of them. Laurie sent a memorial gift in Peter's honor which will go towards a scholarship for a student from Todos Santos. In 1977 she conducted field research there and says that she "was privileged to know and fall in love with Guatemala and the Maya people." Thank you, Laurie, for reaching out to us! Know that the students and we are thinking of you in this time of sadness, wishing you strength and comfort.

## Your Donations Change Lives

### Meet Some of the Scholarship Recipients

Once you meet some of the Maya students, you understand that giving scholarship support in that part of the world makes a lot of sense and is absolutely worth it! When young indigenous women and men don't feel forced to leave their home countries because they see no way out of poverty, everybody wins. The young people we support are poor but proud and ambitious. They work hard in school and want to make a better life for themselves, their loved ones and their communities. One thing we hear time and time again is that they feel part of their communities and want to improve them. Here are some of the students who will be able to do just that:

Lisbeth Floridalma (also shown on the cover), a recent *licenciatura* graduate in medicine in Guatemala, writes: “MEF supported me with a scholarship for my medical studies for five years. I now work as a physician, caring for workers in a company. As planned, I contribute by helping people who otherwise have no or only very scarce access to health facilities. All the patients I care for are poor and from rural areas.” Lisbeth hopes to be able to continue studying towards a *maestría* degree soon.



MEF facilitated a cultural visit of Lisbeth to the Seattle area this year. She gave talks at three universities. Haley, a Western Washington University student who heard her speak shared her reaction, saying: “Being able to meet Lisbeth and hear her story was an amazing experience. She is such a strong person and I love that she will be dedicating her studies to giving back to her community. That the Maya Educational Foundation was able to help Lisbeth attend college and visit us really makes me appreciate programs that help students in her similar situation. The world needs more opportunities for people like Lisbeth to share their stories and be given the resources they need to achieve their goals.”

Enrique is a current student in medicine in Chiapas. This year he is doing internship rotations in family medicine, including pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology. He reports that he was part of a medical brigade that recently traveled to the municipality of Cintalapa for a medical care event that drew 7,000 people. His group of



medics alone tended to 600 patients with all types of health issues, including asthma, anxiety disorder, high-risk pregnancies, breathing problems, kidney failure, fractures, and many more medical conditions. Enrique writes: “I thank you very much for the help you have given me, as it has allowed me to reach the goal I dreamed of. Our communities in Chiapas need humane medical professionals who will be prepared to address the many health problems that threaten the population here. I hope you will continue to support me with a scholarship so I can finish my studies.”

This year your donations support scholarships for 180 Maya students in university, 226 at middle and high school level, and 44 in elementary school. In addition, you are helping Maya students and adults who are benefitting from job skills training, language classes, and workshops for women weavers in Guatemala.

Thank you!



Werner Tomás studies nutrition and says:

*“The MEF scholarship not only helps me to develop as a person and a professional, it also helps with the development of my community. The more educated professionals a community has the more possibilities there are for progress.”*



Ketzali Awalb'iitz is studying music. She writes:

*“As a young indigenous woman and musician I have been able to be an inspiration to many Maya boys and girls on the community level because the community radio and various organizations of my people have recognized the political and musical work I do.”*



Lucrecia Concepción is studying health sciences and says:

*“Education is not just for personal growth but also a fundamental ingredient for the development of our society. The support we students receive here will gradually lead to a society where women have opportunities for growth through higher education.”*



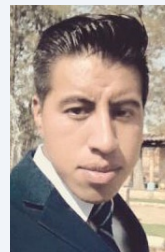
Vilma studies medicine and writes:

*“In my community there are not many medical professionals who can speak our Maya language. The scholarship allows me to study and to strengthen my feelings of cultural identity and will help me to bring good medical care to the people of my community and to contribute to the health and development of my town.”*



Silvia, a student in Chiapas, is studying education to become a preschool teacher. She is currently writing her thesis on violence and how it affects preschool age children. She says:

*“Without this scholarship, I could have never made this dream come true.”*



Mariano graduated this year in eco-tourism and is now doing his practical year in a consulting company for tourist services in Chiapas. He writes that students are required to do this social service in order to contribute to society and to gain practical experience in their chosen professional disciplines.



Santos graduated with a *licenciatura* in medicine this year. Soon, he will continue working towards a *maestría* degree. He writes:

*“I am convinced that all the efforts of MEF and its donors have absolutely benefitted the students directly, but also indirectly our whole society. As a physician I have now started to work at a private hospital in Guatemala City. I also work at the Lung Center (Liga del Pulmón) where I have the opportunity to treat respiratory diseases.”*

Once they graduate, these and the other MEF students will be able to make positive changes in the world around them.



# The Maya Educational Foundation is turning 25!

by Elisabeth Nicholson, Executive Director

It's hard to believe that 2017 will mark 25 years of MEF's work of providing Maya students with educational opportunities in Guatemala and beyond. We are both happy and humbled to see that MEF has endured and persevered this long. I still remember how MEF became an official non-profit in 1992 and started by giving scholarships to two Maya students. Today it supports more than 500 students in Guatemala, Chiapas, and southern Belize. While the scholarships are our trademark, some funding also goes to a few non-scholarship partners and projects that contribute to the educational and professional advancement of the Maya people. Thus hundreds more Maya children and adults benefit through workshops, language classes, libraries, research and learning centers.

We can give this aid only because of our supporters who care about the countries we work in and the future of its indigenous people. We owe MEF's longevity absolutely and one hundred percent to you, our donors: the individuals, families, foundations, and church, school, and volunteer groups, and especially also our supporting organization, the Plumsock Fund. Thank you!

Over these past almost twenty-five years I've been privileged to witness MEF's work and contribute to it. With only a tiny staff and an all volunteer board and friends, we may not stand out with a glitzy website or cutting edge social-media, but hope that MEF stands out to you with a proven track record of strong, steady, and faithful efforts on behalf of the Maya students and its support of educational initiatives and partners.

We know full well that each year you have all types of charities appealing to your generosity and are therefore all the more honored that you have stood by us and have sustained your support to MEF, many of you even increasing your contributions over time. We are facing great challenges in the years ahead, due to substantial funding phasing out and increasingly more students reaching high-school and university levels which cost more. In order to keep the programs intact and vital, we need to raise more and also new funding. Please, help us spread the word and support the Maya people by giving to MEF.

Every time we visit with program beneficiaries, the Maya students express their gratitude for your generosity and ask us to convey their blessings to you and your families. May you and yours have a healthy and happy year.

## Join us!

The Maya Educational Foundation is a public charity that relies on a broad base of donors small and large to keep its programs running. Every Dollar you give to MEF counts and makes a difference. For ten times less than what it costs in this country, a Maya student in Guatemala, Belize or Mexico can attend university or vocational high school. If you or someone you know would like to sponsor a Maya student, just let us know. We'll arrange it.

Thank you.



Two of the 20 Esperanza Juvenil students supported by MEF

## 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 liking us on Facebook and spreading the word about our work and mission

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

## 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.

Your donation to MEF will help change lives.

## Maya Educational Foundation

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