



Maya Educational Foundation

Changing Lives through Education since 1992

2018-2019 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.



María Sol with her parents at her 2018 graduation as a teacher

There is no better reward than hearing from students when they reach their goals. María Sol is such a student in our Ben & Lois Paul program which is supervised by our friends at Maya Traditions.

“Your generosity to students like me made it possible to get my high school degree in 2013 and now my teaching degree.” (See her on the cover.)



María Sol and her parents in 2013



MEF university students and Pablo Chavajay in Xela

**For information on our work,
partners, and projects,
please visit
www.mayaedufound.org
and follow us on Facebook**

Dear Friends,

This past June and July, I made four visits with students and partners in Guatemala: CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica) in Antigua, FEPMaya (Fundación para Estudios y Profesionalización Maya) in Mixco, the Ben and Lois Paul scholarship program in San Pedro La Laguna, and the residence for FEPMaya university students in Quetzaltenango. During my visits, I could see the hard work staff members are doing in supporting higher education and the commitment and motivation expressed by the students in pursuing their academic goals.

In this letter, I would like to share with you my observations and conversations with the group of students living in the city of Xela (Quetzaltenango). The twelve students, ten of whom are young women, all come from small Mayan villages in Huehuetenango, Quiché, and Sololá, states located in the western highlands of Guatemala with predominantly indigenous Maya populations. Half of these students are studying to become nurses, while the remaining students are pursuing professional degrees in psychology, civil engineering, medicine, and business administration at Universidad Rafael Landívar, Universidad Mariano Gálvez, Universidad Mesoamericana, or Universidad de San Carlos.

The students expressed deep appreciation for the scholarships along with their sense of responsibility and enthusiasm in honoring their commitment to study. They view their scholarships as providing them opportunities to fulfill their academic dreams. Once they graduate, it will position them to seek employment that will allow them to improve their lives and those of their families and communities. The students also shared the progress they are making in their studies and some of the challenges they continue to face living and studying in

Xela. Some students characterized their group of 12 residents as a big family whose members are supportive of each other's academic goals, open and respectful to one another's ideas, and responsible for sharing daily tasks that make their residence run smoothly. Their perspectives on group cohesion reflects the strong sense of collaboration emphasized and valued in many Mayan communities in Guatemala.

I would also like to report that during our annual meeting this past August in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Edward Fischer

became MEF's new vice president, replacing Laura McClusky. We are grateful to both of them for their continued work in supporting MEF's mission.

Finally, on behalf of the MEF family, we express our deepest gratitude to you, our donors, who make it possible for Maya students in Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico to attend university. I hope you will continue to help our wonderful and hardworking students to achieve their educational goals by making a generous donation. Thank you in advance for your support!

Sincerely,

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

Pablo Chavajay, MEF President

Giving Maya Students a Chance

MEF is providing support to a total of 460 Maya students this year, most of them at the university and high school level. Programs that receive MEF funding are located in Chiapas, Mexico, in southern Belize, and in Guatemala. The scholarship support is critical for these young people to be able to make their way through school and especially university. Though all students have great economic need, MEF scholarships are not handouts but, rather, are closely tied to the students' own hard work and dedication to their studies. In most of the programs the students are also giving back in the form of performing service in community projects, assistantships, mentoring, and more. In all of our programs the fact that students are Maya is respected and Mayan languages, history, and culture are recognized, even at MEF partners where the student body is not exclusively Maya, as is the case at our partner Esperanza Juvenil in Guatemala City.

At other partners, too, students have meetings and learn about Maya history and culture. At Colegio Paxil, in Nebaj, all students learn to speak Ixil and boys as well as girls learn backstrap weaving as part of their curriculum and follow the Maya calendar.



Girls at Esperanza Juvenil learn about the history of the Maya people.

Donor News

When recipients like Grupo Cajolá in the photo below express their thanks, their gratitude really belongs to you, our donors. We are grateful to all who gave to MEF this year, the Plumsock Fund, the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation, the Chiapas Highland Maya Fund, and all other foundations (some prefer to remain anonymous), groups, and individuals.



We were honored to receive two generous legacy gifts this year: one from the Anne C. Wilson Trust with the wish that it benefit the work of our partner Maya Traditions, and another one from the estate of Robert C. Harman for MEF scholarships. Bob was a true friend of the Maya people and he believed in giving them a chance at higher education.

We thank all of you who have commemorated loved ones, birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, and even weddings by donating to MEF. More donations translate into us being able to give support to more students. Your gifts for education make a vital difference in the lives of Maya students. Thank you!

Partner News

- Congratulations to MEF partner CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica) in Antigua on their 40th Anniversary. This social science center is a haven for scholars and the general public seeking to consult or immerse themselves in Guatemala's history and culture. Important photographic and document archives are preserved and maintained at CIRMA and cultural events and exhibitions take place there. Students utilize CIRMA's library and its staff also visits schools to teach students important research skills. MEF is a proud supporter of this educational and cultural resource that is free and open to the public. In-country and international internships as well as inter-institutional relationships are going strong and CIRMA has recently received grants to preserve and catalog important collections.



Standing room only!

A recent conference and book presentation at CIRMA drew an enthusiastic crowd of some 300 people from all walks of life.

- We also congratulate Amigos de Santa Cruz in Guatemala on their 20th Anniversary this year and their good work. MEF supports eight Maya university students at this nonprofit partner.

Brenda is studying nursing and health management.



Santos graduated with a teaching degree.

- We thank our colleagues at Sna Jtz'ibajom in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico for agreeing to accept twelve full-time university students into the scholarship program they manage for us, allowing us to consolidate two groups into one. We thank FOMMA for supervising these Maya students until now and wish the FOMMA women continued success in their theater and writing work. At Sna Jtz'ibajom there will now be 31 MEF scholarship students entering their next academic year.



MEF scholarship students transferring to MEF partner Sna Jtz'ibajom in San Cristóbal meet with staff.

- We applaud our largest scholarship partner FEPMaya (Fundación para Estudios y Profesionalización Maya) in Mixco, Guatemala for supervising 70 Maya university students. 130 students have thus far graduated at this MEF partner alone, most of them with a *licenciatura* and a few of them with *maestría* degrees. Over the past two years FEPMaya has secured housing in Xela, in Cobán, and in Mixco for more than a third of its students, creating a safe and collaborative environment for them. We thank Andreas Boueke and family for providing student housing in Mixco, not far from the FEPMaya building.
- FEPMaya also helps with the U.S. volunteer-run English Language Program (ELP) which is now under the leadership of Randhi Wilson, after the retirement earlier this year of our friend and amazing volunteer Laurie Levinger. A group of seven volunteers, most of them experienced ELP teachers, are planning to arrive in Antigua, Guatemala at the end of December and will be teaching Maya university students English for two weeks in January.
- We thank our partner Colegio Paxil in Nebaj for accepting five girls from Chajul into their school after their parents did not want them to continue their dangerous travel to a school much farther away. Our friends at AMACHAJUL asked if we could help and, with the approval from our board and the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation, we were able to make this transition happen and to grant support.



Meet Other Recent MEF Graduates



Jacquelyn graduated with a psychology degree.



Jorge graduated and is already working as a teacher.



Deisy is now a professional chef.



Byron graduated as an agricultural engineer.



Enrique is now a medical doctor.

Helping Our Neighbors

by Elisabeth Nicholson, Executive Director

With the heartbreaking news of children being forcibly separated from their parents at our southern border and other rough treatment of even legal asylum-seekers who are trying to flee to a safe haven, many of us feel great sadness and feel compelled to act and to alleviate the suffering there.

It is important that we look across our borders and understand the reasons for this influx of people seeking better lives. The root problem in the countries where these would-be immigrants come from is a lack of opportunities to improve what are often extremely impoverished, hopeless, and dangerous situations, thus making escape the only resort. We don't see these immigration streams from nations where citizens feel safe and are able to build good lives.

MEF attacks the root of one of the problems: the lack of higher

education opportunities for indigenous groups in Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico. Our scholarship students who graduate from university do not feel compelled to leave

their own countries. Fortified by professional degrees, they have the confidence and qualifications to compete in the job market. Often, their own Maya communities benefit from their newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Many of our graduates are willing and even eager to return to their hometowns to help. Just a few examples: Former students who have graduated are now improving Cajolá (teachers, doctor, nutritionist) or Entre Ríos (teachers, computer specialist, and agricultural engineers), or former MEF students in Chiapas are now working as medical doctors, nurses, dentists, and teachers in their Maya communities.



Carolina is going to be a nurse in Chiapas.

Sponsor a Student, Change a Life!

Marcelino is a Maya student from a very poor farming family in southern Belize. His dream of attending high school has become possible because a donor stepped up to help.

Please consider sponsoring a student in one of our programs.



To make a truly lasting and effective change in a person's life, invest in her or his education.

Thank you
for your support.

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

P.O. Box 1483, Wellfleet, MA 02667, USA
mayaedufound@aol.com • www.mayaedufound.org
Tel: (508) 349-1330 • Fax: (508) 349-0252



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

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Phone _____

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