

Maya Educational Foundation

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



# Maya Educational Foundation

Changing Lives through Education since 1992

## 2019-2020 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.



Students in Todos Santos, Guatemala with some of their parents

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Regina is a MEF student in Belize. Despite having no electricity in her home, she is undeterred and considers her school work very important. She is determined to become a nurse and help the sick elders in her community.



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

During our recent annual board meeting we accepted the retirement of Laura McClusky. We thank Laura for her dedication and wish her the very best in her future endeavors. At the meeting we also confirmed our board's commitment to advancing the Maya Educational Foundation's mission of providing underprivileged Maya youth of Guatemala, Chiapas (Mexico), and Belize opportunities to pursue higher education. As the president I want to express my gratitude to each of our board members and to the executive director for their enthusiasm and hard work on behalf of MEF and to you our donors for making it possible through your donations that the educational and professional dreams of many Maya students become a reality.

As a Tz'utujil Maya myself and a former student attending public schools in Guatemala, I can relate to the many challenges Maya students face in their studies and daily lives in the dominant society. Despite these challenges, the students work hard and eagerly to achieve their goals. During my visit to Guatemala this past July I had the opportunity to talk to one of these students who is pursuing



a medical degree at San Carlos University in Quetzaltenango. His name is Diego Felipe, a Tz'utujil Maya from San Juan La Laguna who recently finished his six-month internship in the pediatric department of a public hospital and is currently completing a six-month internship in gynecology in a public hospital in the state of Totonicapán. Putting in practice the skills he has learned, Diego Felipe, along with other medical students and a few medical doctors of his university, spent two days and nights providing medical assistance to children and adults in a community affected by the eruption of Volcán de Fuego near Antigua. He plans to start his supervised practicum in 2020 in a small community which will become the basis of his thesis requirement for finishing his medical degree. He also told me that his future plans include seeking opportunities to pursue a specialization in the area of neurosurgery.

María from Todos Santos (see also page 4) is another MEF scholarship recipient, a young Maya woman who completed a social work degree a few years ago and, in a month, will have finished her master's degree in education. Her education and experiences have led her to becoming a regional delegate for the Consejo Nacional de Atención al Migrante de Guatemala (CONAMIGUA), an organization that provides assistance to immigrants and their families, those living outside of Guatemala, and those returned and living in the Huehuetenango region. The assistance to the immigrants and their families is key, given that Todos Santos and nearby communities are affected by the great number of people leaving their communities in search of a better life.

Diego and María represent the caliber of students you our donors are supporting. They prove that the scholarships are making a difference in the lives of Maya youth who come predominantly from small, poor villages in Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize. I hope you will continue to contribute to MEF for students like María and Diego who are highly motivated and thankful for the opportunity to pursue their academic dreams.

Thank you for your support.

  
Pablo Chavajay, MEF President



## MEF Stands for “No Frills” and “In It for the Long Haul”

You, our donors (some quoted below) deserve all the credit for MEF being able to carry out its mission of offering higher education scholarships to Maya students since 1992. You have helped to graduate more than five hundred Maya students, from college-prep high schools, vocational high schools, and universities in Guatemala, Mexico, and southern Belize. They are now making a difference in their communities and their countries as physicians, nurses, dentists, teachers, lawyers, human rights workers, engineers and more. Depicted here is one of our most recent graduates, Maria Guadalupe, a business major from our FEPMaya group in Guatemala.

If you think long-term (each student takes five to seven years to complete university studies, depending on her or his chosen discipline), it is a wise investment as it creates future changemakers in the countries we serve. We have donors who see students through all of their education years, though we don't expect that of everyone. We just want you to realize the impact you are making when you contribute to MEF programs, with donations large or small.

We work on a shoestring budget here in the USA so that more can go to the scholarship programs. We have no fancy headquarters, company cars, or large staff. When we travel to visit our projects we do so simply, with no frills or luxury. When supervisors and students understand this and it clicks with them during visits, you can see how touched especially new students are who did not realize this before. Often, they may think of MEF as a rich, abstract entity. When we make it clear that we receive donations as small as five dollars from folks here in the USA who can barely spare it but who want to give anyway, it touches them deeply and they convey their gratitude in their words, hugs, and letters. We tell them the best way to thank us is to work diligently and succeed and help other Mayas to do the same.

MEF is in it for the long haul, supporting each student for the duration of their studies.

In rural areas it takes a long time to see change. In Todos Santos Cuchumatán, MEF started years ago to support young, elementary school children and 2020 will see the last three students from that group enter university. Thanks for this achievement

go to students, parents and supervisors, and to some special funders, especially the Daniele Agostino Derossi Foundation, the Shelton Davis Fund, and the Crockett family. —Not long ago we visited in the Quetzaltenango student house where several of these students live together, helping each other, a few of them studying to become nurses. The house was filled



Maria Guadalupe graduated in business administration.  
Congratulations!

with optimism and collaborative spirit. Eulalia, a blind student, lives there too and receives assistance from the other students. She is studying psychology and recently was able to purchase a new laptop with software for the blind, a generous gift from the Shelton Davis Fund. We wish her and the other students in all MEF projects persistence and success.



Melissa (left) and Eulalia (right)



### A Girl Who Loves Math by Sterling Crockett, a long-time MEF supporter

Traveling to Guatemala in 2011, I wandered the marketplace in Quetzaltenango one day and met a 14-year-old girl named Marta kneeling on the ground who was selling bracelets. As we conversed for a few minutes it became clear she was no longer in school as her family did not have enough money and she was selling things in the marketplace to help make ends meet. I had met girls in this situation before, but something caused me to ask a follow-up question: “What was your favorite subject?” - She looked right at me, her eyes brightened and she responded, “I loved math!” — Math was easily my favorite subject in elementary, middle and high schools, and then college. It immediately occurred to me that perhaps the one real academic difference between Marta and me was the fact that my parents had been able to afford to keep me in school and hers could not. So, I bought a bracelet and I still wear it to remind me of that experience. — After arriving home from that trip, my wife and I decided that, although there was nothing we could do for Marta, we should find another 14-year-old girl and try to help her be able to complete her schooling. — Through MEF we were able to find someone and are still supporting her now so she can achieve her long-term goal of becoming a nurse. She and her family have sent us letters over the years and by virtue of a common friend we also connected via social media! It continues to be a wonderful experience for our entire family and we hope to meet our new friends in Guatemala someday soon.



### MEF Graduates are Making a Difference!

María was a student in our FEP Maya scholars’ group. She recently wrote, thanking us for her scholarship support and invited us to her graduation, saying:

“I am eternally grateful for the opportunity you gave me.”

She now works as a social worker in an organization that helps returnees and young people in search of higher education (see also page 2). She believes it is of utmost urgency that more educational opportunities are created for young people in search of better lives in order to stem emigration from the region.



Former students now lead our Guatemalan nonprofit partner FEPMaya where 70 university students receive MEF scholarships. Their new board president, Salomé Us, is a women's rights lawyer, their vice president Julio Cutzal is also a lawyer and helps other Maya people. Lisbeth Chuy Chalí, their treasurer, works as a medical doctor in a Guatemala City hospital. These busy graduates serve on the board in order to ensure that other Maya students, now in the program, can reach their graduation goals. It's their way of giving back. The students we support are hopeful, energetic, and talented young Maya women and men who are changing their own fate and that of others. If they are the first in their families to make the leap to higher education, they are inspiring their siblings to emulate them. A scholarship lifts them and their whole family up and gives them more options.



We also had a number of MEF scholarship students graduate in Chiapas, Mexico this year.

We congratulate them and are so very proud of them. We thank our partner Sna Jtz'ibajom for supervising and mentoring these talented young Maya students, giving them confidence and strength.

Andrea in Chiapas who studied early childhood education just graduated. She tells us:

"I can say that I have chosen a wonderful career that requires me not only to educate the children but to motivate them and to awaken in each one of them the desire to continue to learn, guiding the children in a world where they can resolve their own problems and form their own identities.

I thank MEF and its donors for the support they gave me, especially in the last few years, which helped me to cover expenses during my practice teaching and the writing of my thesis."

Luis Fernando studied education and now works as a bilingual teacher in Chiapas and writes to us:

"Again, with all my heart, I thank the Maya Educational Foundation for all the support it has provided.

I'm hoping that you will continue to support more young people like me who have difficulty studying due to being poor. Today many of the indigenous families are low-income and cannot fulfill their children's dream of getting an education. Many of the young people want to advance, but because of the lack of economic resources they fall behind in their studies, also because there are no high schools nearby, especially none in the most marginalized communities in the state."



These bilingual teachers in Chiapas will be able to address their students also in the Mayan language and remove psychological barriers that existed for young children with just Spanish speaking teachers.

Current, continuing students in Chiapas include Martín (right), who is studying to become a medical doctor, and Josefina (below, third from left), who is studying to become an electrical engineer.



## Why We Give for Education of Maya Students in Southern Belize

by Barbara Cordell and Joe Bartnik

My husband Joe and I have gone to the Toledo District in Southern Belize each of the last twenty-five years with a medical mission group. While we care deeply about providing healthcare, we also know that education changes lives in a myriad of constructive ways. Therefore, we always try to emphasize education while there. We met Norma Cal when she was about the age of her daughter Celi in the photo with her (see photo). Each year I encouraged Norma to consider college some day and told her that when the time came, somehow, we'd help her attend. Fortunately, we found MEF the year she was ready for college and knew this was the avenue for us to help Norma. We gave money to MEF and they did the rest to ensure Norma had



supplies, support, and everything she needed to be successful. Now

Ms. Norma is teaching in Hope Creek and impacting many more lives through education (see photo of students at Hope Creek). Since Norma graduated, we've helped several other scholars who want to become teachers or nurses. I know that each scholar with MEF goes on to positively influence so many other Maya people in Southern Belize. What could be better reasons than those precious children to give money to Belize through MEF?



## English Language Program

by Carol Hendrickson, ELP-Guatemala Volunteer

I've been a volunteer teacher with the English Language Program on three occasions and look upon my weeks with the Antigua-based program as a special opportunity to work with highly motivated Maya university students. The ELP provides two weeks of intensive language training, a 24/7 experience that is a lot of work, but also serious fun. Mornings are spent in focused language work, first altogether (some 20 students and 8 teachers) and then in small groups determined by language level, each with one or two teachers. Afternoons include guest speakers, games, and outings (scavenger hunt, visit to CIRMA, or a basketball game). And evenings mean homework but also the occasional additional event (a movie or the end-of-ELP talent show). This past year students were examined for their language level at the start of the program and then at the end. The overall improvement was very impressive. One reason I think the ELP makes such a difference, beyond the sheer concentration of time focused on language, is that students are asked to practice, practice, practice; take chances; and engage in conversing and writing when they aren't graded. Inhibitions drop as the group works together on English (with insights too for teachers on Spanish and Maya languages). In Guatemala, English is important for many university careers: for academic materials only available in that language, meeting other scholars, and preparing for professional life in country and also the world. The English Language Program helps Maya students achieve their goals.



### Why I Donate

by Barbara Rogoff, author of *Developing Destinies: A Mayan Midwife and Town*

I am pleased to be able to contribute funding to MEF for supporting Maya students, for several reasons:

1. **To give back.** I am grateful for the opportunity that Maya children and families have given me, over four decades, to understand Maya ways of learning. The generosity of Maya people has contributed to my understanding of how people learn, as expressed in *Developing Destinies* which I wrote with a leading Maya midwife and two of her grandchildren.
2. **It's only fair.** The resources available to me and my community and country have been at the expense of Maya people (among others).
3. **For the sake of the world.** Supporting the enormous potential of Maya students brings hope for their being able to contribute solutions to the problems facing the world.

## How You Can Help

There are several ways you can help MEF:

- ✓ 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
- ✓ by shopping online and making MEF your chosen charity, e.g., at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)

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.

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