

Maya Educational Foundation

P.O. Box 1483, Wellfleet, MA 02667, USA
www.mayaedufound.org



Maya Educational Foundation

Changing Lives
through Education
since 1992

2020-2021 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.



Pedro Damián, student of sociology in Chiapas

Dear Friends,

In the hopes that this newsletter finds you and your families doing well during these difficult times, I would like you to know that at the Maya Educational Foundation (MEF) we continue our work with energy and commitment. Jolted by the loss of three good friends of MEF earlier this year: Robert Laughlin, Vincent Phillips, and Narciso Cojtí, we pledge to honor them through our hard work. We are strengthened by having Karen Kaiser as our newest board member. With her economics background, she is assisting MEF with financial planning and decisions. Our board has started to have strategic meetings with the goal of safeguarding the future of MEF and with the commitment to continue supporting Maya youth of Guatemala, Chiapas, and Belize to pursue higher education. We have completely redesigned our website www.mayaedufound.org and are also on Instagram now. Take a look.

Despite the many challenges that indigenous families and communities are facing during this pandemic, I am glad to report that most of the students we support in Guatemala, Chiapas (Mexico), and Belize are making steady progress in their academic pursuits. Some of the them still manage using their cell phones while others have the use of computers. Where we did find groups of students facing the most difficult time and really struggling by having no or only very limited access to computers, we have started to target that area for improvement (see pages 3 ff).

In keeping with the deeply rooted sense of community that Maya people live by, teachers working with our partner organizations have made extraordinary efforts to assist their students by bringing course assignments to the students' homes and at later date assessing their students' completed homework. These, and other teachers across small communities in the countries we serve, walk extreme distances to reach out to their students while others do so by traveling on bicycles or motorcycles. Our scholarship program supervisors keep in close contact with them to inquire not only about their academic progress but also about their well-being, including that of their families and communities.

On behalf of the Maya students, our nonprofit partners, and MEF, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your support. You are making it possible that underprivileged indigenous youth have the opportunities to accomplish their educational goals. Please, continue to support MEF's mission with your donation. Thank you!

Sincerely,


Pablo Chavajay, MEF President



Teachers in Entre Ríos, Petén, Guatemala visit with a student at his home.

Traversing a Challenging Year

By Elisabeth Nicholson, Executive Director

This has been a very difficult and tragic year for many. The crisis is worldwide and is not just health, life, and economy- related but it is also affecting all of us psychologically. Hard for us to take is the government dictated or self-imposed social isolation from loved ones, the restrictions on travel, and even the fear in everyday life of taking public transport, running errands or going to a store. However, for the families of our beneficiaries who were already living in poverty, food shortages, sky high prices and a lack of medical services and supplies are magnifying their plight. Our partners on the ground are helping with food, medicines, medical care, and more. They are doing their part to help the most vulnerable members in their communities make it through this. Other initiatives from some of our partners include selling Maya woven products now online, including Covid masks, to secure some income for the Maya families. The MEF scholarships have now become lifelines for the students and their families. Most students are home now and contribute to the household.

MEF Initiatives of Hope: Sharing Some Encouraging News

—After putting out the word about the *10-year Anniversary Matching Challenge* in May to give to the Shelton Davis Scholarship Fund in memory of Sandy Davis, donors sent enough contributions in May and June to qualify us for the 10k match. Thanks to that, we will be able to cover eight university scholarships for 2021 for students from the Todos Santos/Santa Eulalia region in Guatemala.

We have a beautiful video to share with you that our partner FEPMaya made for us.

This is as close to a real-life visit as we can get this year. Here is the link: <https://bit.ly/2FHW8m9>

—In June we kicked off our *Bridging the Digital Divide Campaign* and were surprised and touched to receive an immediate and very generous response from a loyal donor and her husband, giving us a jumpstart right after announcing that we were looking for support to purchase laptops for serious and hardworking students who do not have one. We wanted to begin this effort at our largest program with FEPMaya in Guatemala where most of the 70 students are trying to participate in their courses online while they are not in student housing in urban centers. Later, four more donors stepped up to complete the total funding needed to be able to purchase 17 laptops in Guatemala City for students at FEPMaya. — The purchase and distribution have now happened and we could not be more grateful to our amazing donors for their generosity. Thank you! We will continue this campaign to benefit students in other programs, too.



Ana María (in the red blouse) studies business administration in Xela, Guatemala. Here she is shown with her Mom and two of her sisters.

First Endeavor: Accomplished!



A few special people made this effort a reality on the ground at FEPMaya, in particular Jacquelyn Sincal (in above photo on the right, with Daisy Yohana, an environmental engineering student). Her never-ending patience and level-headed management of all problems put in front of her make her an impressive young woman. A MEF graduate with a psychology degree, FEPMaya hired her to be in charge of supervising and mentoring 70 university students in Guatemala. **Thank you, Jackie!**



Elsa Susana is on track to become a CPA.



Magalí is studying biochemistry.



José Manuel in Cobán is studying to become a nurse.

“In these times, knowing that MEF continues to support young people to become leaders in and across their communities is a source of inspiration and path toward understanding and justice.”

James Loucky,
professor of anthropology
at Western Washington
University

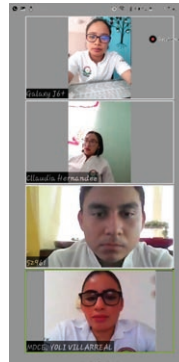
Second Phase for Chiapas Underway

The students are very grateful to the donors for the computers as it will allow them to be able to take their online classes, without having to try and find a computer to borrow or an Internet café where they need to pay by the hour and are more exposed to the virus. — Within this campaign to get laptops to our students, we have now begun to tackle the situation at our major scholarship partner in Mexico, Sna Jtz'ibajom in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Of 30 students there, 13 do not have their own computer to work on. Many have to walk long distances to find one to borrow or buy time to work on one. Some are still trying to get by with their cell phones, which is getting more challenging, the longer the online learning phase lasts.

If you are able to and want to help, a modest laptop in San Cristóbal costs \$650 dollars. If you feel that this effort is a worthwhile undertaking, please donate by check or at www.mayaedufound.org and let us know in a note that it's for the Bridging the Digital Divide Campaign (BDDC).

We know for certain that each computer we can supply will change one student's life for the better. She or he will then be able to prepare reports, participate in Zoom classes, skype with their teachers and professors, and feel they can continue and see their studies through to graduation.

It's an ambitious goal and we want to make it very clear that we are raising funds for these laptops only after a thorough examination and analysis is done by the program supervisors. This effort is targeted to help students in most serious need and it is not a willy-nilly handout to all.



Please, join us in helping hardworking students like Floricenda who is studying to become a nurse in Chiapas.

Pedro Damián, the student also depicted on the cover writes: “Being in quarantine due to the Covid-19 virus, to keep up to date with school activities I resorted to a cyber [café] to connect to the internet to be able to download different texts in pdf and print them. As I could not go there every day to do my work, I saw the need to borrow a laptop and thus do more at home at night reading the texts and activities that my teachers requested.”

He appreciates the scholarship support and also an extra stipend we were able to give this year, due to a special donation for Chiapas students: “The scholarship support has helped me a lot in the continuation of my career, for the payment of tuition and obtaining didactic materials. I also thank you for the extra amount that you gave us this year. With a part of it, I was able to support my family in the purchase of food and with the other part I was able to buy a pair of glasses. Since spending so much time in front of a screen doing my work or reading texts my eyes quickly got tired and irritated. This was a problem I've been having a long time, but now it's a problem solved, thanks to you.”



Madaí is another one of our scholarship students in Chiapas without a computer of her own. She studies preschool education and describes how hard it is for her in her rural community of El Limar to complete her course work remotely. She says that it is especially difficult for indigenous people to receive classes virtually for a lack of technology and resources.

To make a safe donation online, please go to
www.mayaedufound.org Thank you.



In Belize, the Julian Cho Society kindly allows the university students in the program to come to their office in Punta Gorda where they can use the office computer. Students reciprocate by taking on some responsibilities at this nonprofit. Our board just recently voted that MEF will continue its small program in southern Belize for students from agricultural and extremely poor families like Francilia and Rolando.



Francilia is a MEF sponsored university student in Belize. She wants to become a teacher.



Rolando recently graduated from technical high school in Corazon Creek Village, Toledo District, southern Belize.

Program supervisor Pablo Mis reports: “Rolando completed his high school studies at Corazon Technical High School this year. Achieving this under Covid restrictions was difficult for him. Fortunately, Olario, a past MEF scholar who is now a teacher and headmaster, helped Rolando to get his schoolwork which was published in the national newspaper and tutored him to complete the tasks. Due to Covid, Rolando’s school did not have a graduation ceremony but he received notification of his qualifications to graduate.”

Congratulations to Rolando and thanks to his mentor Olario!

Transcending Distance and Time: John Prybot, Volunteer and Friend of the Maya People in Guatemala

This year marks John's 50th anniversary of Peace Corps placement in San Pedro la Laguna, at the time a town of about 4,500 majority Tz'utujil Maya inhabitants. John says: "By the time of my departure at the end of 1979 the different communities had become so much a part of me that they would not be left behind. Conscious of the glaring disparity in access to resources in rural, predominantly indigenous communities of the Pacific lowlands in contrast to the highland region where attention and foreign assistance were concentrated, I undertook to fund education for a group of aspiring young people from Samayac and San Antonio Suchitepéquez. The students I sponsored became "ahijados" [godchildren] and family in enduring connection transcending distance and decades. Subsequently, I learned of the inspiring advances MEF has made possible for Tz'utujil students and have contributed to MEF's Ben and Lois Paul Scholarship Program ever since."



John (in the middle) with friends in Guatemala at a pre-pandemic visit

We salute John for his steadfast commitment to the Maya people.

We will Get through This

Despite all of its trauma, this period of the pandemic has given many of us pause to see what is important and space to think. It is a time to pare down to basics and to focus. For us at MEF, it is the core work of providing educational support in the form of scholarships for Maya students, especially at university level. While we did press the pause button on expanding any of our programs right now, it made us want to make the programs that we do have underway even better for the students. With students stranded at home, we saw the serious problem they had when not having access to a computer. So, we decided to make the laptop quest a priority this year.

What we know for certain is that we cannot and must not stop our work. It's especially important to not stop during a time of crisis such as the present. We can grieve, we can reflect, but we must also go on helping others as much as we can.

If you are able to, please make a contribution to MEF this year, so that we can continue all existing programs. The scholarships have become life sustaining to many now. — You may have a preferred country or region where you want to help Maya students, or you may have a loved one in whose honor you would like to donate. Just let us know. We always appreciate hearing from you. Any amount will help a Maya student in Guatemala, Belize, or Mexico. *

We wish you and your family good health, love and friendship and we thank you for your interest in MEF and your support of our work.

Elisabeth Nicholson

*See what a modest stipend did for Pedro Damián this year (p.5).



Sandra, a Tz'utujil student from San Antonio Suchitepéquez, Guatemala graduates in childhood education.

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 spreading the word, liking us on Facebook and following us on Instagram
- ✓ by shopping online and making MEF your chosen charity, e.g., at 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 Maya student at university for one month.
- \$ 100 supports a Maya student in high school for one month.
- \$ 50 covers the cost of weekend workshops that teach individuals how to read and write their indigenous language.

Any amount helps.

Make your donation to MEF
by check, phone, or online at
www.mayaedufound.org

Thank you!

Your donation to MEF will help change lives.

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