

Maya Educational Foundation

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www.mayaedufound.org



Maya Educational Foundation

Changing Lives
through Education
since 1992

2024-2025 Report



The Maya Educational Foundation (MEF) supports the educational and professional advancement of the Maya people in Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize, with special consideration given to women and girls and to students from remote areas.

Go, Girls! – One example of female MEF scholarship students and graduates is Sandra from San Antonio Suchitepéquez, who graduated as a teacher in 2024. She is shown here with her mother and sisters. What a joy for her mom and what a great inspiration for her younger siblings.

Dear Friends,

Hoping that this letter finds you doing well, we'd like to give you some of the year's highlights so far.

—Together with our nonprofit partner CIRMA in Antigua, we launched the **Programa de Becas Mayas MEF**, serving 60 Maya full-time university students from all over Guatemala. We are glad to have CIRMA's excellent oversight in Guatemala and thank all involved for making this new scholarship program possible. We had our first official gathering, with students, staff, and honored guests (see p. 3). A wonderful event!



—We are pleased to present the special **Joan Robinson Scholarships 2024**, a group of 30 Maya students, named in honor of Joan who tirelessly worked for and cared about marginalized people all her life. We thank her family and the Foundation and will share student snapshots and information throughout the year like this one of Ana María from a remote village in Sololá. She is studying medicine and is shown here shelling corn with her mother. Like many young Maya women in our programs, Ana María is the first woman in her family to attend university, which makes her feel proud and happy.

—We have already shared with you notices about the impressive 20th Anniversary of the **English Language Program-Guatemala** (see 2024 midyear letter and August E-bulletin) and congratulate all involved. The next course will take place in Antigua from November 30 to December 14th, with 13 teachers and 27 students. With the donations received in response to our special ELP fundraiser in August, plus the volunteer teachers' own contributions to cover one student's room and board each, we raised a total of \$5,700 in support of ELP-Guatemala and ELP-online. Thank you!

—In 2024, our board conducted an international search for our next Executive Director and hired **Amy Holly** in October. She will take over the post fully when I leave that role at the end of April 2025. We welcome Amy with complete confidence that she will do an excellent job leading us into the future. Kudos go to board members Pablo Chavajay, Serita Frey, Kedron Thomas, and Randhi Wilson for carrying out a careful and exhaustive search. Amy, who grew up in the United Kingdom, has extensive nonprofit leadership experience and has lived in Guatemala for 14 years. With her guidance, we believe MEF will grow stronger and will be able to broaden its reach. Amy joins our team that also includes Norma Subuyuj and Jacquelyn Sincal. More about our staff at www.mayaedufound.org

MEF has been my life for more than 30 years. I thank all who worked with me thus far and am humbled by the quality, depth, and goodness that I observe in the caliber of students we attract, in our wonderful staff and advisors, our donors and board members. Though it is helping the Maya people specifically, MEF is itself a kaleidoscope of colors, genders, ages, races, and backgrounds, whether you look at the founders, the donors, students from all Mayan language groups, board, volunteers, or staff. We like it that way. We want to go together towards a brighter future, united, with nobody left behind and with opportunities for all.

After April next year, I won't abandon supporting our work and mission and will fill in as needed. MEF is not any one of us, it's all of us. I appeal to you to keep supporting, or start supporting MEF. It's worth it and you are changing lives forever, including your own. With fondest regards and best wishes to each of you.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth S. Nicholson
Executive Director

Programa Becas Mayas MEF (PBM-MEF) with CIRMA

The first ever annual PBM-MEF student meeting was a joyful and overwhelmingly positive event. Even the week-long rain stopped and the sun came out for it. Each student spoke to and with us, as did invited guests and CIRMA leaders who honored us with their presence. They included Brenda Rosenbaum and Irma Otzoy, Christopher Lutz, Ada Redondo, Guisela Asensio, Mitchell Denburg, Hector Concohá, Reyna Pérez, among others. We had the pleasure of hearing them speak and give the students much encouragement. We ate together and Norma, Jacquelyn, and the staff and director of CIRMA deserve huge thanks for making all the preparations. Here is a photo of the students and one of most of us present.



Welcome Students, Welcome Visitors to the First Student Meeting
of the Programa de Becas Mayas MEF con CIRMA!



Our Scholarship Students are the best MEF testimonials



In Belize, our colleagues at the Julian Cho Society in Punta Gorda keep us informed about the students in the MEF-JCS program that serves high school and university students.

Abner is a determined and ambitious first form student from a very remote village in southern Belize. Despite the challenges posed by the distance and isolation of his village, Abner is determined to excel in his studies and make his family proud.

He recognizes the transformative power of education in creating a better life for himself and his family. With unwavering determination, he has embraced the opportunities provided by his school to grow and learn.



Derilyn (shown here with her mom) is a second-year student at high school. She is driven by the belief that education is instrumental in unlocking opportunities and achieving her aspirations.

Growing up in a single-parent household has instilled in Derilyn a strong sense of responsibility and determination. She knows that education is the key to a better life for herself and her family, and she is committed to her studies with dedication and enthusiasm.



Christal is this year enrolled in Tertiary Level Programs. She is from a small Maya community.

She is an optimistic, ambitious and determined young woman.

Christal is currently pursuing her Associate's Degree in Tourism Studies. She intends to use this degree to develop tourism in her community, where she

sees multiple opportunities for entrepreneurship.

She plans to create and work with small businesses to develop her village of San Miguel.

This year, our scholarship program in Belize serves 22 Maya students (16 female, 6 male). It covers tuition, fees, books and uniforms. The students come from 14 remote villages in the Toledo district which is known for its high poverty rate.

These communities have only limited access to basic resources such as electricity, cell and internet services, or decent roads. This presents a massive barrier and stacks the odds against the students. It is with sheer will and determination that they continue to pursue their studies and is a testament to what education means to them.

In Chiapas, Mexico

With the help of our nonprofit partner Sna Jtz'ibajom (House of the Writer) in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, MEF is able to support 35 full-time university students and 10 in our Chenalhó program, seven of them in vocational high school and three at university level. Here are some of them:



Esteban is finishing his degree in Indigenous Community Development and Management.



Chiapas is one of the poorest states of Mexico with very low levels of higher education in the Maya population groups.

Let's change that, one graduate at a time.



Alma proudly graduated as a nurse this year.



Christine Eber visited with scholarship students in Chenalhó earlier this year.

In Guatemala

Jesús Irene, a student at our partner Mayan Hands, is in her third year of the Nursing program at Universidad Panamericana, Sololá.

She writes:

“Among my most important activities are my practices and the work experience I am getting in various health centers and hospitals.

At the beginning of the year, I was doing an internship in the Santa Rosa department at the Cuilapa Regional Hospital, specifically in the pediatric ward where I was able to learn how to calculate the dosage of medications for children, health care and child hygiene, among other activities.

This semester I am at the Health Center of the Nueva Vida community in the municipality of San Lucas Tolimán in the Maternal & Neonatal ward. I have also made home visits for prenatal care of women during pregnancy.”



One of our ten medical students at University Rafael Landívar (URL) at their San Pedro Claver campus is **Rosvin Alexi**.

He is in his fourth year, doing internal medicine practicums and rotations in one of the national hospitals in Cobán, Alta Verapaz.

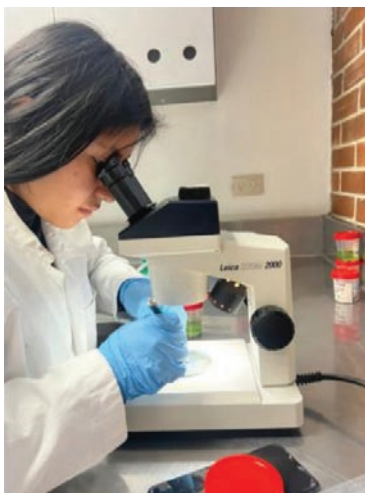
In the case of our URL student group, we do not pay the scholarships to the students, but their dues and fees directly, and supply laptops to each student in need, all via the university. In addition, MEF also covers transport and other unforeseen costs incurred when the students have to go to distant places to do their *prácticas*.

All these URL students will be either nurses or medical doctors, which are sorely needed in Alta Verapaz.

YOUR DONATIONS TO MEF ARE CHANGING LIVES.

This year we are grateful to our donors for making it possible to support the education and training of 442 Maya students at university and vocational high school in Guatemala, southern Belize, and in Chiapas, Mexico.

GO, GIRLS! Given the long neglect of girls and women in education in the countries we cover, MEF insists on the inclusion of a higher percentage of females over males in all of its programs. We are happy to see increasingly more Maya women in higher education and in non-traditional disciplines.



Adriana studies Criminal and Forensic Sciences at partner Esperanza Juvenil.



At our partner Amigos de Santa Cruz: **Veronica** is in her fourth year of studying Architecture in Quetzaltenango. **Gladis**, on the right, is in her first year of studying for a degree in Tourism.



From **Juana Herlinda** in our program with Mayan Hands:

“I am originally from the municipality of Nahualá, department of Sololá, I am an indigenous woman who speaks the K’iche’ language. I want to express my gratitude and above all the happiness that I feel today for having achieved the title of Bachelor of Social Work with Orientation in Sustainable Development extended by the Universidad Panamericana in Guatemala City.

As the oldest sister I very much feel the responsibility of being an example for my siblings, I feel happy because I am the first professional in my entire family with the title of Bachelor. This triumph was possible thanks to the financial support of the Maya Educational Foundation that I received for six years.

I am sure that without this scholarship my dream of studying would not have been possible.”

Preserving Cultural Heritage, History, and Mayan Languages



For the past 41 years, members of our partner Sna Jtz'ibajom have worked to preserve and revitalize Maya cultural heritage through their writings and theater and by teaching Mayan language literacy.

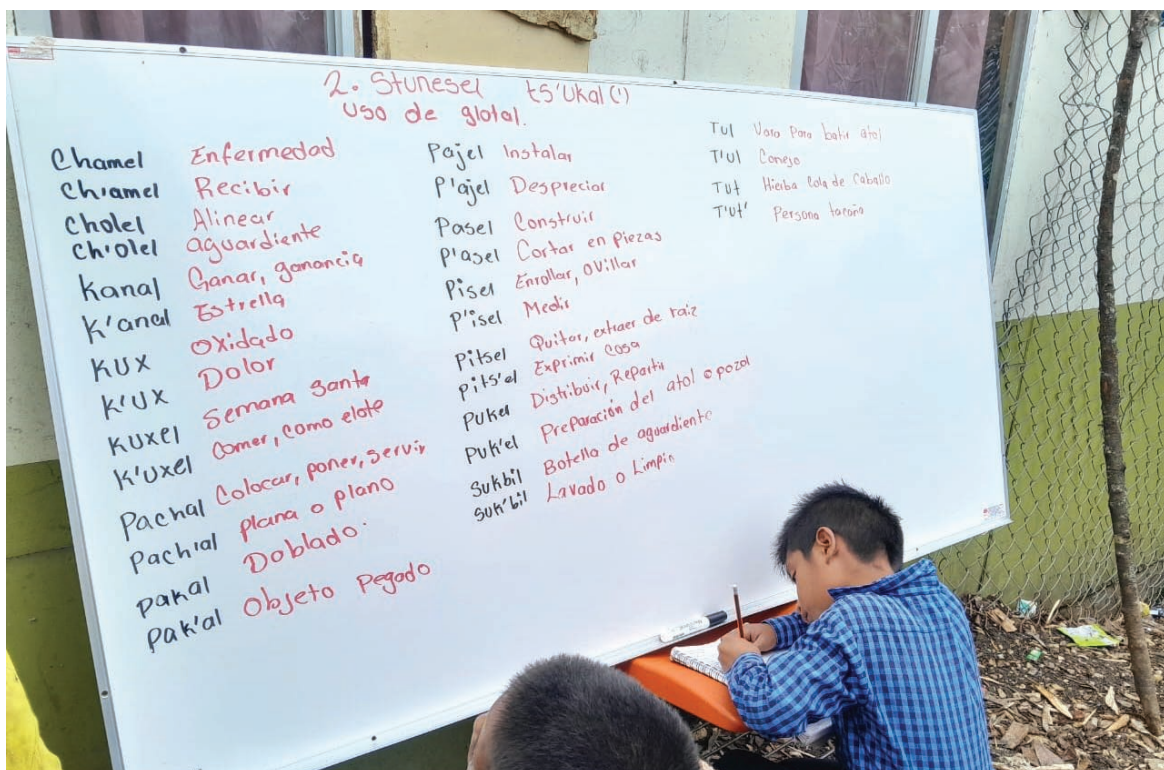
Sheila, a MEF student with Sna Jtz'ibajom, is studying Language and Culture in Chiapas and is currently writing and reviewing her thesis.

Here, she is interviewing a village elder about customs and religious rituals to do with revered and important patron saints in Tzotzil and Tzeltal communities.

Sheila will become a teacher, working in a Maya community.



Sna Jtz'ibajom brings Mayan language literacy courses to villages in the Chiapas highlands.



Studying Mayan languages in Chiapas

MEF supports the work of its partners Sna Jtz'ibajom in Chiapas and CIRMA in Guatemala and applauds their efforts to preserve cultural heritage, history, and languages of the Maya region and beyond. More at www.mayaedufound.org

CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica), a guardian of history in Antigua, Guatemala is one of our major partners and its main mission, since 1978, has been the rescue, conservation, organization, and dissemination of the visual and documentary heritage of the Mesoamerican region, with an emphasis on Guatemala.

Students, the public, and scholars come and peruse important photographic and text sources about the region. Frequent exhibitions and tours are offered. This year, we thank CIRMA especially for deciding to collaborate with MEF and give a home to our university scholarship program (see p. 3), and for offering space and respite to all.



Notable & Creative Gifts this Year

—We thank **Weaving for Justice**, not only for raising funds for Maya students year-round by selling donated Maya textiles in Las Cruces, New Mexico, but for deciding earlier this year to dedicate the proceeds from the sale of a very special donation of 25 Catherwood colored prints to MEF for scholarships, resulting in a generous contribution.

We are grateful to each of the women and men who volunteer their time and labor regularly to organize the popular textile sales. We are thankful for their generous and warm hospitality during our October visit last year, especially to Christine, Janet, Aurelia, Lorena, Norma, Patricia, Guillermo, Andrea and Greg, Lori, Flora, Karen, Tess, Susan, Sheryl. It was so good to meet them all. We know that hundreds of your volunteer hours flow into this project of “Textiles for Scholarships for Maya Youth.” Laura Irene, pictured here, is one of the students in Chenalhó, Chiapas, who benefited from such a scholarship and graduated with a degree in Agroforestry.



—We are happy to give an update on our **Art for Good Fundraiser**, which we first wrote to you about in mid-2021. <https://mayaedufound.org/art-for-good-peter-ruta-chiapas-and-guatemala-paintings/>

Suzanne Ruta, wife of the late artist Peter Ruta, conceived and inspired this effort and to date has generously donated six paintings to three individuals. They, in turn, have given sizeable donations to MEF. The net total, with a recent pledge, stands now at sixteen thousand dollars and benefits scholarships for Maya students in Chiapas, Mexico. We thank Suzanne, her daughter, and the donors for their generosity and interest in helping Maya students in Chiapas.

—In memory of groundbreaking anthropologist **Susanna M. Ekholm**, who passed away last September, we received a generous donation from her family. Living in Chiapas for more than 50 years, Susanna most notably worked on Early, Middle, and Late Preclassic ceramic sequencing (1000 BC-AD 250) at Izapa and co-discovered the Olmec Rock engraving of Xoc in the Chiapas rainforest, confirming the presence of Olmec civilization in the region. The gift in Susanna's honor will underwrite university education for four Maya students in Chiapas for a full year.

Thanks go to Judi and Erik Ekholm and family, and to all who honor their loved ones with a charitable donation, during their lifetime or after.



Photo courtesy of the Ekholm family.

We Already Miss Her!

We said a fond goodbye to our Treasurer Karen Kaiser (on the right) in our annual board meeting and appreciate her providing MEF with keen financial guidance during her tenure. We wish her all the best in her future.



I Do Believe (by Elisabeth Nicholson)



Sandy Irene is becoming a nurse in Guatemala.

I am grateful and can say without doubt that your support to MEF has made countless positive and powerful changes possible since 1992. Whole Maya communities in Guatemala, Chiapas, and Belize have benefited from job skill and literacy workshops, the creation of town libraries, schools in remote areas, a Mayan-language radio station, a cultural center, student housing, a computer center, teacher stipends, tuition help, and more.

However, the greatest changemaker, I believe, have been and still are our scholarships. The students receiving them are able to study and graduate, filled not only with knowledge in their chosen fields, but also filled with pride and more respect than ever for their own Maya heritage. The students meet each other and realize that they, individually and as a group, are strong, smart, and full of promise.

Yessica is a student in environmental studies, supported by the Diane Nelson Scholarship Fund, and writes: "I am the first girl in my family to study and become a university graduate. I would like to one day support my family financially. At the same time, I want to be an agent of change in my community by preserving the forest resources that are available today and raising awareness among people about the importance of these resources for the balance of our ecosystems."



Give the gift of higher education to a Maya student. The bright young women and men in our programs have great potential and are the hope and future of their countries.

Thank you!



By donating to MEF, you are giving Maya students in Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico the chance to achieve professional careers, to overcome poverty, and to prosper in their own countries.



Joel (left) is now a bilingual teacher in Chiapas.



Manuela is now a nurse in Guatemala.



Jessica (right) in Belize graduated high school with a business degree.

How to donate to MEF: ♦ Online via credit card or PayPal for one-time or recurring donation ♦ By check in the mail ♦ If you wish to donate stocks, mutual funds, or make an in-kind or legacy gift, please contact us. **Thank you.**



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José Domingo (r) studies Zootechnics in Guatemala and helps his parents when he is home on weekends.

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Thank you!