

# Solidaridad: News from Foundation Todos Juntos and Pop Wuj

Fall/Winter 2015

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Welcome to the Fall/Winter 2015 issue of Solidaridad, a newsletter from [Foundation Todos Juntos](#) and [Pop Wuj Spanish School](#). This edition includes a message from Roney Alvarado, the co-director and co-founder of Pop Wuj, plus articles about the Family Support Center, service learning in the Pop Wuj Clinic, and the Nutrition Program. Thank you for your continued support of the community projects in Guatemala. Enjoy!

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## **A Message from Roney Alvarado**

After nearly 24 years, we continue to follow our founding principles as a Guatemalan association that created a Spanish school in order to fund social projects. The local directors and teachers volunteer our time and donate our profits to what we consider our historical and humanitarian responsibility: the social, medical, and educational projects for which our organization was founded.

As many of you know, Pop Wuj's ability to partially fund the projects depends exclusively on the presence of Spanish students. We are grateful for the continued success of the Spanish school, in large part thanks to former students' recommendations and word of mouth. In addition to the Spanish school in Xela, we also now offer online Spanish classes. Details are available on our [website](#).

As the projects have grown, so too has the support of people like you. Pop Wuj continues to be the means by which good intentions are channeled in order to help people.

In addition to providing the institutional structure, physical space, services, staff,

and organization, Pop Wuj also continues to support the projects economically. Of course, we need students in order to meet our annual financial commitment to the projects.

Thank you for keeping in touch for another year, for supporting our work, and sharing information about our school and projects.

## School Vacation at the Family Support Center



Olympic action in Llanos! Photo by Elizabeth Barnes.

By Albizael Del Valle

Vacation learning loss is a cognitive setback commonly observed in young students during school vacation periods. After weeks of vacation without summer learning, students lose more than two months of reading achievement levels and mathematical computations skills. In the U.S., vacation learning loss affects mostly low-income students due to the unequal access to summer learning opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

The National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) is a United States organization that addresses vacation learning loss. Based in Baltimore, Maryland, the NSLA has proven that high quality vacation learning is crucial in order to close the existing achievement gap.<sup>2</sup>

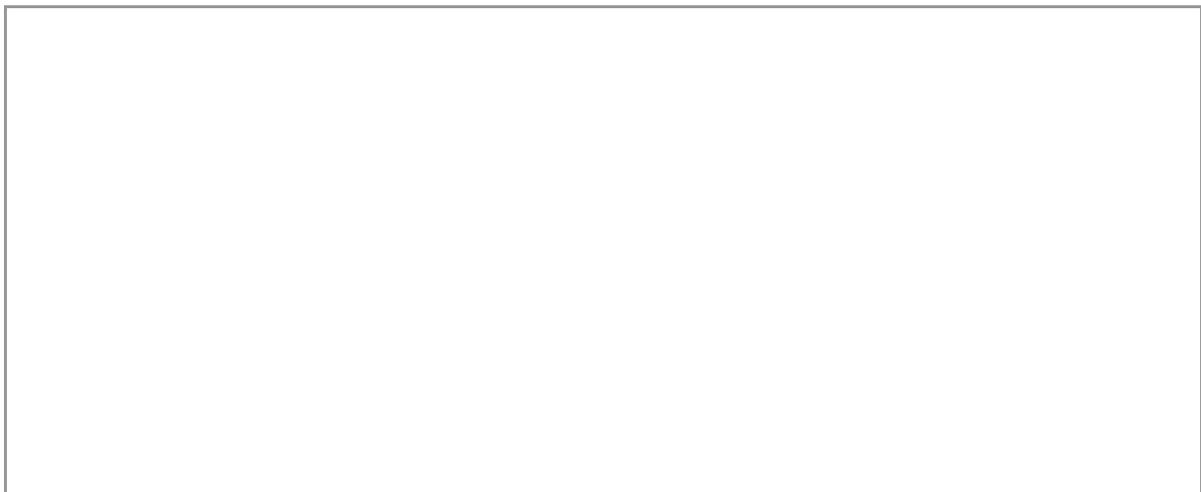
Llanos del Pinal, a rural community in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, shares these struggles. However, the Family Support Center and Pop Wuj have seen the struggles this rural, low-resourced community faces and, much like the NSLA, are standing up to help. Pop Wuj has supported students through scholarships, the before- and after-school program, and so much more. Now that the Guatemalan school year has ended, we are excited to share the details of our annual vacation learning program.

Pop Wuj provides a vacation learning program at the Family Support Center that continues the cognitive progress of the students, while also being significantly different from their typical educational experience. Education in Guatemala relies on a very traditional pedagogy, focusing heavily on repetition and memorization.

We also want our students to partake in physical and creative activities during school vacation. Our greatest goal is to support these students holistically as they grow and develop into responsible professionals and citizens.

The 2015 vacation activities include:

- English classes
- Math & accounting classes
- K'iche' classes
- Reading activities
- A writing project with the older students
- Creative expression classes (including writing, dancing, singing, etc.)
- Kite building and flying
- Field days
- Hikes
- A Christmas art project
- A birthday party for the participants with birthdays in October, November, and December





Kindergartners, first graders, and second graders play a math game during vacation school.

Photo by Elizabeth Barnes.

Pop Wuj has supported these children for many years and the positive impact in the children's lives is evident. As an organization, we look forward to breaking the cycle of vacation learning loss and educational inequality as we help these students use their school vacation to its utmost potential to keep moving forward.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/13/summer-programs-provide-u\\_n\\_897566.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/07/13/summer-programs-provide-u_n_897566.html)

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/21/summer-learning-loss-study\\_n\\_3391594.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/21/summer-learning-loss-study_n_3391594.html)

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## **Service Learning in the Pop Wuj Clinic: Family Support Center and Scholarship Students Give Back and Prepare for Careers in Healthcare**





Dinora and Erick in the Pop Wuj pharmacy. Photo by Elizabeth Barnes.

By Elizabeth Barnes

Every Pop Wuj Medical Spanish student working in the clinic comes to rely on Dinora Magaly Gomez Sacalxot. A soft-spoken, unassuming high school graduate, Dinora has volunteered with Pop Wuj's medical projects since February and learned all there is to learn—where to find the blood pressure cuffs, why Dr. Barbara has prescribed Plumpy'Nut over Maní+ (pronounced Maní plus) for an infant in the nutrition program, how to dispense complicated prescriptions, and how to coach patients on diabetes management.

Dinora is volunteering at Pop Wuj because she has aspired to be a nurse “since [she] was little.” At age 7 she began receiving a Pop Wuj scholarship and entered the Guardería Todos Juntos, where she stayed for three years. She generated fond memories of baking chocolate chip cookies at Pop Wuj and hiking in the mountains to plant saplings for a reforestation project. Dinora's work with the medical projects is a natural extension of her long relationship with Pop Wuj.

“When I was in the Guardería [now the Family Support Center] they asked me, ‘What do you want to be?’ ‘A nurse.’ Later in school they asked me, ‘What do you want to study? What do you want to be?’ ‘A nurse,’” Dinora said. Her volunteering has confirmed that she is on the right track: “The fact is that I feel even more that I want to study nursing.”

High school students Verónica Gricelda Istazuy Pérez and Erick Giovanni López Saquich have also been part of Pop Wuj's Family Support Center and scholarship programs and began working with the medical projects in anticipation of their own careers. Verónica volunteered for a month and a half last fall and plans to be a doctor, though she will likely have to work and save money after graduating from high school in order to afford medical school.

"I like treating people and helping them with what I can," she said.

Erick just recently started an internship at the Pop Wuj Clinic as part of his high school program. "I have always dreamed of becoming a professional nurse," he said, "and it's the only thing that I want in life."

Especially in the "low season" when fewer foreign students volunteer through [Pop Wuj's Medical Spanish Program](#), the local volunteers are invaluable to the shorthanded medical staff. The doctors see approximately 60 patients per week in the clinic and 90 babies per month in the nutrition program. The volunteers help take vital signs and medical histories at the triage stations, weigh and measure fussy babies on nutrition days, escort patients to nearby laboratories for tests, count and dispense medications under supervision, and train patients in the proper way to administer their prescriptions or make the lifestyle changes recommended by the doctors.

Verónica vividly remembers the nervousness and pride she felt at first pricking a patient's finger to test their blood sugar. Dinora loves interviewing patients at the triage station.

"I enjoy talking with the people, getting to know them," she said. "And I like when they begin to explain [their problems]."

Volunteering in the Pop Wuj medical projects is a challenging commitment. In nine months, Dinora has missed only a few work days. Erick must prioritize his internship over fun activities such as Las Olimpiadas (the Olympics) that his peers at the Family Support Center enjoy.

Like Dinora's older brother Gustavo and Verónica's older brother [Santos](#), who now teach at the Family Support Center, the medical volunteers work at Pop Wuj both to advance their own careers as well as serve the communities where they grew up. Llanos del Pinal offers a couple of health centers and dental clinics but no mental health services, so after working a few years as a nurse Dinora would like to pursue psychology to fill that need.

"There is so much they don't have," Dinora said. "And most people there come here [to Xela]. They don't go to the health center. Some go, but the majority comes here to the hospital or other clinics in the city."

The volunteers' next steps will be difficult. Applying to medical and nursing school is an arduous process. But the hands-on experience gained in the medical programs will give them an advantage.

"It's good to put effort into my studies, to learn a little about everything here in the clinic, and put it into practice," Erick said.

After completing her volunteer work with Pop Wuj in December, Dinora plans to begin nursing school. She is currently about halfway through a series of exams and interviews for two programs—an "auxiliar" (for a one-year nursing assistant degree) and a "profesional" (for a three-year nursing degree). She should finish her applications and learn her admission statuses by January.

Pop Wuj has the greatest confidence in these three future medical professionals, and we are proud of their generosity and drive to serve others.

"I enjoy helping people," Dinora said, a sentiment shared by Verónica and Erick. "And there is so much need."

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## **The Power of Peanut Butter: The Pop Wuj Nutrition Program Introduces New Supplement in Fight Against Malnutrition**



Dinora and Dr. Barbara measure the head circumference of one of the Nutrition Program participants in La Victoria. Photo by Shanti Aguilar.

By Elizabeth Barnes and Amy Scheuren

Nearly every baby starts to wail as their mother lays them carefully in the sling secured to a hanging scale. Despite the doctors' cooing, they rarely stop until their latest weight, height, and head circumference have been taken and entered in the computer and their mothers have scooped them up again. Disconcerting and unpleasant as those minutes of measurement have been, this monthly checkup provides crucial information. Without it, the doctors cannot know which treatment will be best for each baby's case of malnutrition.

Almost 50% of all Guatemalan children under 5 years of age are malnourished.<sup>1</sup> The statistic jumps to nearly 70% in rural indigenous communities such as Llanos del Pinal, San Juan Buena Vista, and La Victoria, where the Pop Wuj Nutrition Program operates.<sup>2</sup>

At any given time the Pop Wuj Nutrition Program serves 80 to 90 babies between the ages of 6 and 24 months, though a child may receive treatment until the age of 36 months if they are still malnourished. This early period is critical to child development; infant malnutrition has lifelong growth and cognitive effects.

The Pop Wuj Medical Program staff meets monthly with each group of mothers and babies to administer growth checks, facilitate an educational discussion, and provide medical consults for sick children. At the end of each meeting, the staff distributes supplements to each participant, including a month's supply of fortified peanut butter for the baby, vitamins for the mother and any siblings, and the fortified powder Incaparina for the entire family.

Our doctors now prescribe one of three peanut butter-based supplements depending on the condition of each baby. Nutributter and Plumpy'Nut are donated by Pop Wuj's partner [Timmy Global Health](#), which jointly administered the Nutrition Program for several years. In June 2015 Pop Wuj took over all management of the project, and Timmy Global Health's support became purely financial. Since then Pop Wuj has added a new supplement, Maní+, to its arsenal against malnutrition.

**Nutributter** is a peanut and milk protein product that provides 100 calories. The Pop Wuj Nutrition Program prescribes it as a preventive measure for children under two years of age who are at risk of chronic malnutrition.

**Plumpy'Nut** is a peanut protein supplement that provides 500 calories. Endorsed by the World Health Organization for treating acute rather than chronic malnutrition, Plumpy'Nut should be taken for at least six weeks.

**Maní+** is a new Guatemalan supplement, specially formulated to meet the needs of babies who consume the typical Guatemalan diet and therefore lack essential vitamins, minerals, and calories. This peanut and milk protein product provides 220 calories and should be used for at least six months to treat children with moderate to severe chronic malnutrition. Of the 90 patients currently in the Nutrition Program, 50 receive daily packs of Maní+. One packet costs \$0.45 USD, and a month's supply for one baby costs \$13.50.



Trying out one of the supplements during snack time. Photo by Shanti Aguilar.

The introduction of Maní+ to the Pop Wuj Nutrition Program enables better treatment of malnourished babies but also poses a financial strain. The cost of maintaining one child in the program for the recommended 18 months averages \$450 USD, which covers the peanut butter-based supplements, vitamins, Incaparina, zinc supplements, lab work and medicine in case of illness, educational materials, transportation costs, and staff

salaries. Although Timmy Global Health's grant pays many of these expenses, Pop Wuj currently buys all its own Maní+, which amounts to \$243 per child over 18 months.

Many Guatemalan donors and volunteers have stepped up to help us provide the best possible care, and Pop Wuj would like to thank the following artists and businesses for their assistance: graphic and visual artists Alejandro Marré, Juan Pensamiento, and Alvaro Sánchez; musicians Tony Delgado, Jonathan Carrion, and Chamuko, who will hold a benefit concert in Xela on December 11; and Xela restaurants [La Chatía Artesana](#) and [Mandarina](#).

To join them in supporting the Pop Wuj Nutrition Program, please [donate via Foundation Todos Juntos](#) and indicate that you would like to direct your donation to the nutrition program. Gracias!

<sup>1</sup> World Food Program, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/guatemala>

<sup>2</sup> World Food Program, <https://www.wfp.org/countries/guatemala>

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## Donate Now

Tax-deductible donations may be sent via check to:

Foundation Todos Juntos  
P.O. Box 533  
Honey Brook, PA 19344

[Online donations](#) are accepted via PayPal.



[Foundation Todos Juntos](#), a 501(c)3 non profit, was founded in 2001 by former students of the [Pop Wuj Spanish School](#) to facilitate ongoing collaboration with

## Foundation Todos Juntos and AmazonSmile

[AmazonSmile](#) is operated by Amazon and allows customers to enjoy the same shopping options as Amazon.com, but now with the benefit of supporting the work of non-profit organizations. When customers shop on [AmazonSmile](#) and select Foundation Todos Juntos, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to Foundation Todos Juntos. Now we can support the projects in Guatemala with our regular purchases!

## Foundation Todos Juntos Board of Directors

various projects in and around Quetzaltenango (Xela), Guatemala.

Today the Foundation supports educational, medical, social, and public health projects in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. Please visit the [projects blog](#) for regular updates on the projects.



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Pop Wuj Spanish School



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