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Solidaridad: News from Foundation Todos Juntos and Pop Wuj

Spring/Summer 2015

Spotlight: Santos Istazuy Pérez



Santos works with Melissa at the Family Support Center

Photo by Amy Scheuren

21 years old, 1st year university student at the Universidad Panamericana
majoring in pedagogy, Teacher at the Family Support Center, Spanish teacher at

By Amy Scheuren

This summer's *Solidaridad* spotlight is on Santos Istazuy Pérez of Llanos del Pinal. Santos joined the Pop Wuj Scholarship Program as well as the Family Support Center (FSC) as a participant when he was in 7th grade. Santos is the oldest of six children, all of whom participate in the Scholarship Program and attend the FSC. Doña Silvia, his mother, found the Pop Wuj projects when her youngest son was just 18 months old and she needed childcare for him while she worked in other families' homes in Xela.

Santos excelled at the FSC and graduated from high school with a bilingual, intercultural (K'iche'-Spanish) elementary teaching degree in December, 2013. In January, 2014 he began working at the FSC three afternoons per week, focusing on the children who had failed their grade the previous year as well as with other students who were struggling in school.

Santos did an excellent job and in January, 2015 Pop Wuj was able to hire him to work five afternoons per week as a permanent employee of the FSC. Now he works with a group of seven fourth and fifth grade students, explaining homework and assigning supplemental material. With the addition of Santos, the FSC has been able to decrease the size of the groups in the afternoon, thus allowing for more individualized attention and academic support. In addition, in early 2015 Santos completed the 3-month course to teach Spanish as a foreign language. He began teaching Pop Wuj Spanish students in February of this year.





Santos, working with his Spanish student at Pop Wuj

Photo by Amy Scheuren

When asked how the Pop Wuj projects have affected him, Santos replied that they have helped him improve as a person in terms of education, in learning how to relate to people of different backgrounds, and also ultimately changed his course of study to education. Santos reported that he can definitely feel a difference between being a Pop Wuj project participant and an employee. However, both roles require that he take responsibility and commit to his educational and professional goals. He continues to feel a commitment to Pop Wuj, especially Carmencita, the director of the social projects, and the scholarship donors; however he also feels a strong responsibility to be a good example for the children and youth at the Family Support Center.

In the short-term, Santos plans to graduate from university and find full-time work with a public elementary or middle school. Santos' long-term goals include owning his own home and opening a private school.

When asked about his ideal Guatemala, Santos said that he looks forward to a day when Guatemala leaves corruption behind and all Guatemalans have access to a high-level education and appropriate healthcare.

Thank you Santos, for being an excellent teacher, student, and example for the children and youth at the Family Support Center. ¡Te deseamos lo mejor!

If I Have a Stove So Should My Neighbor



Doña Sonia and her children

Photo by Jeff Leventhal

By Amy Scheuren

Out of necessity many rural, indigenous families in Guatemala continue to cook over open fires in their homes. To combat the health, safety, and environmental risks of open fires, Pop Wuj has been building safe stoves for more than 20 years. However, our current group is special compared to previous groups. Pop Wuj has had the pleasure of working with two community members who have helped us find and organize the families for the current Safe Stove Project group.

Doña Sonia, a member of the fall 2014 stove group, is 30 years old and a mother of three. Her husband, a mason, was hit by a car last year and is still recovering from his injuries. To earn money Doña Sonia sells atol, a hot, grain-based drink, in her community.

Doña Fabiola is 23 years old and has an 18-month-old son. Her husband works in the fields in Llanos del Pinal. Their small family lives in one of the rooms in the home of Doña Fabiola's extended family. Doña Fabiola's mother participated in the Pop Wuj

Safe Stove Project two years ago.

Both Doña Sonia and Doña Fabiola brought together neighbors and extended family members to help Pop Wuj form the current safe stove group. Pop Wuj started with their lists of families and then conducted in-home interviews to select the group. Both women expressed their gratitude to Pop Wuj, the students who volunteered to build the stoves, and the donors who helped cover the costs of the project.

Doña Sonia first heard about Pop Wuj's Safe Stove Project from Carmelina, the Safe Stove Project facilitator, and was put on the waiting list. Last fall, Pop Wuj staff, volunteers, and students visited her home to interview the family. When asked recently about the interview, Doña Sonia said that it was a joy to see so many people in her home—especially people who were interested in her personal story. She was excited when the Pop Wuj students came to her home to build the stove, and particularly liked seeing how everyone worked together.



Doña Sonia's children and their cousins play outside the home.

Photo by Jeff Leventhal

Because of her positive experience with the Safe Stove Project and the need that she saw among her neighbors, Doña Sonia shared the Safe Stove Project information. Citing the atmosphere of the project and not wanting to be selfish, Doña Sonia made the connection between five new families and Pop Wuj. In addition, Doña Sonia has four more families interested in joining the next safe stove group! She remarked, "If I

have a stove so should my neighbor.”

Doña Sonia and her extended family also participated in the 2015 Pop Wuj reforestation day in Llanos del Pinal on June 25, 2015. Family members, Family Support Center participants, and Pop Wuj students and staff planted 85 trees on her family’s mountainous land, high above Llanos del Pinal in Chuicaracoj.



Doña Fabiola in her kitchen

Photo by Amy Scheuren

Doña Fabiola, the other group organizer, heard of the project through her mother, who received a stove via Pop Wuj two years ago. Now that Doña Fabiola has her own family, she was interested in a safe stove as well. She also knew that other extended family members and neighbors were still cooking over open fires, so she shared the information and helped form the stove group.

She particularly enjoyed the group meeting at Pop Wuj because she learned about the environmental and health dangers of burning trash and was reminded of the "old times" and the cultural practices of her K'iche' Maya ancestors. She stated that building a safe stove is something that she had thought about since starting her family, however they did not have the knowledge or the financial capacity to buy the materials and build it alone.

During the high season this summer, Pop Wuj students and staff will likely finish the current stove group and start interviewing families for the next group. A construir y compartir!

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Foundation Todos Juntos
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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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