
Solidaridad

News from Foundation Todos Juntos and Asociación Pop Wuj

Fall/Winter 2016



Asociación Pop Wuj is turning 25!
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Show friends and family how they impact your life by donating to a worthy project in their name!

The Family Support Center Welcomes a New Director



Photo by Elizabeth Barnes

Yadira stands as Shaaron, the new Family Support Center director, recognizes the participants who are celebrating their birthdays.

By Elizabeth Barnes

Spirited 5-year-old Yadira becomes uncharacteristically bashful as Family Support Center (FSC) Director Shaaron Hurtado calls on her to stand up. Birthday party attendees cheer and applaud as the cumpleañosera (birthday girl) grins—then drops quickly back into her seat.

The FSC's new director, Shaaron, joined the staff in August following the resignation of

teacher Gustavo Gomez Sacalxot. This transition was the last in a series of big changes at the FSC in the last year. As our [2016 Spring/Summer newsletter](#) recounts, the FSC moved into a new physical space and instituted a new age cutoff of sixth grade.

Hiring Shaaron filled an immediate need for a teacher of the oldest group of third- to sixth-graders after Gustavo stepped down. An FSC alumna, Gustavo taught at the FSC for three and half years. He continues to receive a Pop Wuj scholarship, and his 4-year-old son still attends the FSC.

But even before Gustavo resigned, Director of Social Projects Carmen de Alvarado recognized that the FSC needed additional support. Without a leader to resolve bigger issues on site, FSC teachers often called on Carmen to intervene.

Shaaron has relieved those pressures as the FSC's first-ever director. She has not only taken over Gustavo's class but also introduced structure, led events, and drawn from her training as a psychologist to get to the root of conflicts as they arise.



Photo by Elizabeth Barnes

Shaaron, the new Family Support Center director

While other FSC teachers have themselves graduated from the FSC, Shaaron has had to adjust to a new environment. “In the short time since I arrived, [this job] has taught me to do a little of everything,” Shaaron said. “I believe that I’ve succeeded in supporting each child, each person who has come [to the Center], but they have also supported me in growing and learning. My two coworkers have so much experience, and their experience has helped me.”

With 2016's big changes already in effect, next year Shaaron plans to implement new curricula and activities and develop stronger relationships with the FSC children's parents and school teachers.

“Most of the children in the project have very good grades—[teachers] can already see the difference between the children who are in the project and those who aren't,” Shaaron said. Academics will always be a focus, but in 2017 the FSC will be able to tend more to children's overall wellbeing.

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Photo by Lily Bodinson

With coaxing from his mother, a Nutrition Program participant in La Victoria meets Director of Social Projects Carmen de Alvarado.

Nourishing our Work With 2016's Obstacles, Nutrition Program Grows Stronger

By Elizabeth Barnes

Dr. Carmen Rosa Alvarado Benítez, long-time director of the Nutrition Program, has temporarily left Guatemala. Awarded a prestigious Chevening Scholarship, Dr. Carmen Rosa is earning her master's degree in pediatric nutrition at Swansea University in Wales.

In the long term this experience will help Dr. Carmen Rosa to improve the Nutrition Program. In the short term, however, Pop Wuj has had to seek extra support. Dr. Carmen Rosa had worked extensively both with patients and behind the scenes.

Before leaving in September, Dr. Carmen Rosa recommended Dr. Carlos de Leon as a potential hire. Dr. Carlos offers pediatric expertise and excellent English, which has facilitated communication with Pop Wuj's [Medical Spanish Program](#) students who volunteer in the medical projects.

This staff addition felt crucial after an unexpected outbreak of rotavirus in April and May. Dr. Carmen Rosa and Director of Social Projects Carmen de Alvarado saw six alarming cases of acute illnesses that demanded aggressive intervention, including hospitalization. Resultant laboratory exams, hospital visits, and up to daily checkups placed a huge strain on their resources.

Pop Wuj staff never considered leaving these children and their families to deal with these illnesses on their own.

“All of them are growing up smiling, with mothers more empowered, more prepared, and grateful to see their children out of danger,” Carmen de Alvarado said. Emergency interventions are costly—“but we have saved lives.”

Instead Dr. Carmen Rosa and the Pop Wuj medical team considered how to fortify the Nutrition Program for future emergencies. Hiring Dr. Carlos was one move in that direction. Evaluating treatment strategies and seeking more volunteer and financial backing are others. With the basic model down, what’s most important is finding support to grow stronger.

“The vast majority of our children suffer from chronic malnutrition, but little by little they begin to overcome it,” Carmen de Alvarado said. “Each month we have a child reach normal nutritional parameters. That guarantees a better future.”

Forging Better Futures How Post-Secondary Students in Pop Wuj’s Scholarship Program Create Change



Photo by Carmen María Alvarado Benítez

Pop Wuj Scholarship Program University Students (L-R): Yolanda, Angelica, Santos, Veronica, Juan Javier, and Heidi

By Amy Scheuren

Although the immediate work of the Pop Wuj Scholarship Program is to help impoverished families access education for their children, we recognize that meaningful change often takes generations. Most parents of scholarship students did not complete primary or middle school, and for their children to graduate from high school is an enormous achievement.

Increasingly Pop Wuj serves students who reach this life-changing milestone and set their sights higher. In 2016, 12 students are continuing in post-secondary education.

Most students stop studying earlier, often for economic reasons. Some start working to help their families—or begin their own families at a young age. Others immigrate to the United States in search of economic stability.

Though their backgrounds and educational tracks vary, Pop Wuj's 12 post-secondary scholarship students are all defying norms in their respective communities:

- Yolanda is a former Family Support Center (FSC) participant from Chuicavioc, a village near Llanos del Pinal. Upon graduation in 2017, she will be accredited to teach English in secondary schools and train primary school teachers to teach English as a second language. She is currently employed as an English teacher at a primary school. Read more about Yolanda in the [Winter 2012 edition of *Solidaridad*](#).
- Gustavo and Dinora are siblings from Llanos del Pinal who attended the FSC (then called the Guardería) as children. Gustavo is in the third year of a 5.5-year public accounting and auditing program. Dinora took a year off after high school to volunteer in the Pop Wuj medical projects and take health courses offered by the Red Cross. In November 2016 she graduated from a one-year nursing assistant program. Read more about Dinora in the [Fall/Winter 2015 edition of *Solidaridad*](#).
- Santos, Angelica, and Veronica are siblings from Llanos del Pinal who attended the FSC for years. Santos currently teaches there while completing the second year of an education and social sciences degree program. Angelica is a substitute teacher at the FSC and began her studies in music education at the public university in Xela in 2016. Their younger sister, Veronica, volunteered with the Pop Wuj medical projects and took pre-med courses this year in preparation for her medical school and nursing school exams. Read more about Santos in the [Spring/Summer 2015 edition of *Solidaridad*](#).
- Herman is from a small town near the southern Pacific coast and is finishing a professional nursing program. After graduating from high school in 2011, Herman took two years off to work and save money for school. He will finish his last practicum in 2017 and then graduate as a professional nurse.
- Heidi and Juan Javier are siblings from San Juan Ostuncalco studying at the public university in Xela. Having finished her coursework for law school this year, Heidi will begin her practicum and accreditation exams in 2017. Her younger brother, Juan Javier, finished his pre-med courses in 2016 and will start medical school in 2017. Read more about Heidi in the [Winter 2013 edition of *Solidaridad*](#).
- Samuel Isaac, also from San Juan Ostuncalco, is completing the second year of a systems engineering degree at the public university in Xela.
- Ixmukane and Ebelio are from Xeabaj II, an isolated K'iche' community in the mountains above Lake Atitlán. Both Ixmukane and Elebio started their university educations in 2016. Ixmukane's father was the first person from their community to graduate from high school and go to college. Ixmukane is studying social work. Ebelio is the first person in his family to go to college and has chosen to study education.

These young people are working to improve not only their own lives but also their family's circumstances. They hope to achieve transformative long-term economic stability and leave a foundation for their children's education.

At Pop Wuj and Foundation Todos Juntos, we are so proud of all of our students. But we wish to extend special congratulations to these 12 students who are forging opportunities for themselves and the next generation. Felicidades!

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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
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[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 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.

Are you interested in joining the Foundation Todos Juntos team?

The Foundation Todos Juntos Board of Directors is looking for a dynamic, talented, active and committed individual to be a part of our organization and take on a leadership role! For more information please contact info@todos-juntos.org.

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[Pathways \(Abriendo Caminos\)](#) is the newest project to be supported by Foundation Todos Juntos. Pathways is a small, Guatemalan non-profit association working to support individuals with developmental disabilities in Xela, Guatemala. Pathways offers support services to increase social, employment, and daily living skills for children and adults with developmental disabilities.

To support Pathways, simply [donate](#) via Foundation Todos Juntos and request a donation designation for Pathways. Gracias!

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Through a unique member-advised charitable grant program called [Thrivent Choice[®]](#), members of [Thrivent Financial](#) are now able to support Foundation Todos Juntos.

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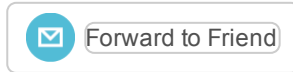
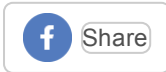
Newsletter Contributors

Carmen María Alvarado Benítez

Elizabeth Barnes

Lily Bodinson

Amy Scheuren



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