

Dear Friends at Presbytery of Genesee Valley, Gates and Batavia,

We at The Garden's Edge wish you all a very Happy New Year. We'd like to thank you for an amazing collaboration in 2016, and for your support again this year. Through the Triple Play grant, we brought 4 Guatemalan Mayan delegates from Qachuu Aloom Association to Rochester for 10 days. We met the wonderful members of Gates, Batavia, the Presbytery, as well as many other community members in the area.

The group stayed with families from the church and made life-long friendships. We visited both churches, where there were large turnouts. The visit was important in many ways. Church members who have not been able to travel to Guatemala, were able to meet the people they support. They heard first hand stories of the way the nutrition project has impacted Guatemalan families. We shared stories, laughed, cried and learned many new things from each other. Batavia Church hosted a dinner and the bell choir performed for the group. We were all so touched by the amazing music and the love they showed us. Kay Fetterly from Batavia, who has visited Qachuu Aloom in Guatemala, said she wanted to put on a really special event for the visitors. She said that when "Gates and Batavia visit Guatemala, the Guatemalans put so much effort into organizing special events for us, we wanted to do the same". They did a wonderful job.

Gates hosted a fun picnic, with games, and story telling, and we attended Sunday service at the Church. The Guatemalans did a traditional blessing of the children during service, and after the service we set up our nutritional monitoring equipment. The congregation was able to see first hand how our nutrition program works. We measured some of the children from the church, and answered lots of questions.

We also visited farms, to share stories and learn new techniques, toured a day care for immigrant children, visited the Ganondagan White Corn Project, spoke on Wayo cultural radio program, saw a fireworks show, went to Niagara Falls, and saw local music.

Damaris Valey, is one of the Guatemalan youth who visited NY. It was her first airplane trip. She expressed that the people she visited helped her feel proud of her culture. She said it was the first time she had ever left her village and felt proud of being Mayan. In Guatemala, there is so much discrimination against Indigenous people.

*"This cultural exchange will help me forever. I have an experience that nobody can take away from me. This is something that we should always do. We should share our experiences, and ideas with other people. Interacting with people is also good because we get to know their ideas too... Many people I met helped me feel like I was at home. I felt I had the power to never leave behind my traditional dress and my native language. For me, it is very important that our kids are aware of how important their*

*family's origin is, and not be ashamed of it. They should be proud of who they are, and where they come from. Nowadays, we have to teach our children to realize how rich we are in traditions and culture and not to be ashamed of our language and dress".*

Another participant, Jose Miguel Gomez, reflects on his trip; *"It showed me that another world is possible. It is not far away, if we keep fighting and working locally. It is not about, how much I do, it's about how much all of us can do, uniting small efforts. All this gives me strength and encourages me to keep doing what I do".*

We can't thank our hosts enough for all the amazing work they put into organizing and financially supporting this event. We'd also like to especially thank Tom and Irene Ward. The Wards hosted a lot of meals in their home, and Tom drove us around the entire state of NY in a van, kept us company, and kept us laughing! Tom also helped find a grant from the First Unitarian Church of Rochester *Paul Wenger and Josephine Wenger Fund*. This grant paid for a large portion of the on-ground expenses in New York, so we could use the rest of the Presbytery money to continue to support the Nutrition and youth programs in Guatemala.

### **Nutrition in Guatemala 2016**

Our nutrition project helps improve the nutritional status of children under 5 in Rabinal, Guatemala where 45.6% of children suffer from chronic malnutrition. The project trains local Maya youth to be leaders in the nutrition program giving them important work experience and leadership training. It values the cultural knowledge of the Achi Maya people. Using native plants like Amaranth that are high in micro-nutrients, as well as traditional medicines, shows the community that the knowledge for solving these problems is in their own back yards. It empowers them to become leaders in the development process and values their knowledge as indigenous peoples.

*"Poor nutrition perpetuates the cycle of poverty and malnutrition through three main routes— direct losses in productivity from poor physical status and losses caused by disease linked with malnutrition; indirect losses from poor cognitive development and losses in schooling; and losses caused by increased health care costs. The economic costs of malnutrition are very high—several billion dollars a year in terms of lost gross domestic product (GDP). Relying on markets and economic growth alone means it will take more than a generation to solve the problem. But specific investments can accelerate improvement, especially programs for micronutrient fortification and supplementation and community-based growth promotion. The economic returns to investing in such programs are very high". – Nutrition Resources*

In 2016, The Triple Play grant in Guatemala specifically covered the following components of our Nutrition Program:

**Youth Scholarship Stipends:** (Scholarship stipends for 4 youth nutrition organizers. They are in charge of helping with monthly nutritional assessments of babies in 4 villages, managing a monthly radio program, and helping during a free monthly nutritional fair in Rabinal's main park.) \$3351.72

**Healthy Snack Program** (Community trainings/meetings, distribution of snacks to village stores): \$632.40

**Product Processing** (This includes making nutritional flours for malnourished children out of Amaranth, Pigeon pea, and Sesame, making cereal bars, toasting pumpkin seed and bagging and sealing items for distribution) \$2,477.52

Total Guatemala: \$6,461.64

Total NY Trip: \$3,538.36 (Airfare, ground transportation in Guatemala, visa fees)

For 2017 the Triple Play Grant will continue to support our nutrition and youth program:

### **Holistic training of youth promoters in nutrition, health and reproductive health in 2017.**

The ***objective*** of this activity is to train youth promoters in how to measure and weigh children, how to enter/analyze nutritional data, and how to lead school nutrition workshops in a fun and dynamic way. The youth are also learning healthy recipes, hygiene, and reproductive health.

With help from our nutritionist; the nutrition youth team will visit Qachuu Aloom families in their homes to weigh and measure children under 5 years old. The ***objective*** is to monitor growth changes and to identify if any immediate intervention is needed. During the visit children in need of nutritional supplementation will be identified and attended to. They will distribute any emergency intervention needed –Zinc pills or protein flours (Amaranth, Pigeon Pea, Sesame)- to help the child recover and prevent nutritional deterioration.

More than 100 children under 5 years old will be the ***beneficiaries*** of this activity. And 5 youth participants.

### **Healthy eating habits workshops in 2 village schools (Nueva Esperanza (New Hope School) and the Regional School)**

The ***objective*** of this activity is to provide nutritional education to young people from two village schools. This activity consists of workshops during the school year in each grade at each participating school. There will be one workshop per month. The topics consist of basic nutrition and are adjusted to each grade level: healthy eating habits (junk food), basic nutrition, effects of malnutrition, healthy snacks and

recipes, and the historical and cultural significance of the food. The methodology we use includes fun interactive group games accompanied by short videos.

### **Healthy Snack Program:**

Increase access of healthy snacks for children and families through community stores. (Community stores are little stores located in the villages, usually inside of family's homes. Two years ago, we started a "healthy snack" program. We produce healthy cereal bars made of Amaranth, as well as other products like pumpkin seeds and distribute them to the community stores, so families have access to healthy foods.) Before this project, the only snack food available in these stores was junk food, like Cheetos, hard candies, Doritos, coke etc.

This project also helps other members of Qachuu Aloom because they are able to sell their surplus harvest to Qachuu Aloom to process and add value. Qachuu Aloom dries and packages them for sale in community stores that are participating in the nutrition program. This helps the economy of each farmer and provides access to healthy food for children and villagers.

### **Implementing two school gardens**

We will continue to work with the 2 school gardens. For these gardens, we have the support from the teachers and parents. This support is vital to make the gardens successful. In the first phase of this project, we were able to plant traditional, highly nutritious plants like Amaranth and use them not just to teach students about nutrition and health, but also to help teach them about the culinary traditions of the Achi people.

Many of the most highly nutritious plants (Amaranth, Chipilin, Macuy etc) that the Maya have used for generations are the most undervalued. In cities they are referred to as weeds, and people are often embarrassed to admit they eat them. Through the work of Qachuu Aloom, we have successfully re-introduced these plants into the diets, and they are part of both school gardens.

Some of the questions we tackle with students are; how did their grandparents harvest and use the plants? And why did they fall out of use? We find it helpful to have a historical and cultural component to the gardens. This has boosted interest in the school gardens and gotten student's families more invested.

We are so excited to work on the Triple Play again this year. Thank you from all of us at The Gardens Edge and Qachuu Aloom. Tremendo!