



LEARNING COMPONENT, 13 Feb 2013

**Mr. Doug Jones from the Board of Directors, Hearts and Hands
On the work of Hearts and Hands, programs, funding, and volunteering**

Abstracted from the February 13 School Council Minutes:

Background: The Hearts and Hands Foundation strives to assist indigenous families through programs in health and education. As an organization they assist the Mayan family in Central America to help themselves. Numerous donors provide funds or materials to assist in program implementation.

Programs include:

1. **Health Programs:** These include: stove construction, water filters, dental clinics, and nutrition programs.
2. **Education:** Several initiatives include: elementary classrooms, playgrounds, kitchens, and latrines have been constructed. Scholarships and teacher professional development is also offered.
3. **Ancillary Programs:** Arts Festival in Uspantan is sponsored; reforestation programs; school bands; partnership with USAIS to provide books and school supplies; dental hygiene program with Colgate Palmolive; Guatemalans helping Guatemalans (Chacha)

The stove building project has been very successful. To date, approximately 4,000 wood burning stoves have been built in 45 communities. While open fires have been used in the past, the new stoves are 80% more fuel efficient, and are safer as they address carbon monoxide levels, improve respiratory and eye problems, and save trees (families use 1-3 pieces per meal of wood compared to 10 used before). Use of these newer stoves is also life changing as the women of the households don't have to spend time (saves 1-2 days per week) searching for wood. As the open fire has been eliminated, the newer stoves also decrease the incidents of burns on the smaller children in the family.

Over 500 water filters have been installed in the kitchens of homes and in the classrooms of schools. These are basically plastic containers with a sand filter. Most filters have been provided through a partnership with Rotary Club Guatemala Norte. Trainers are travelling in to communities to teach the adults and the kids how to use them and how to service them properly. .

A nutritional pilot program commenced in Los Chivitos in September 2011. This program addressed various issues including: malnutrition, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Participants included women, teachers, a Principal of Los Chivitos, 2 staff, and 2 volunteers.

Once a year, the Foundation tries to include a team of **volunteer dentists** who pay their own way to travel and to care for patients who would not otherwise receive this attention. At present, six clinics exist, and an average of 130 patients in each clinic are seen. People will wait hours just to see the dentist at these clinics! About 1,000 people have been treated. Infection and clean conditions are always an issue. Most of the patients have never seen a dentist in their life!

In Guatemala, many Mayan families cannot afford to send their children to school due to a low income. In partnership with Rotary International, other Rotary Clubs, Canadian and Alberta governments, and the

Municipality of Uspantan, **education** is a major focus of the Hearts and Hands Foundation. So far, 15 schools have been built with the funds raised. In addition, 5 more schools are to be completed by March 2013. All you need to be a teacher in Guatemala is a grade 8 education!

In Guatemala, children have never seen a **playground** until recently. The kids don't know how to play as they're out in the fields working for the family. The effects of building playgrounds is remarkable. For example, in one area where a playground was erected, the kids came at 7am and stayed on it until dark!

Enhancing Secondary Education in Guatemala is another goal of the Hearts and Hands Foundation. In 2010, two junior/senior high schools were built in Uspantan and the goal is to provide a complete high school education to kids in grades 7 to 11. Technical schools are also needed to train students after senior high school. It is important to note that most kids don't continue education past grade 6, so providing these kids the chance for education is giving them a wonderful opportunity. Failing school is difficult as the students will be out of school and back into poverty. Many fail as programming is taught in Spanish which is not their mother tongue. This is a difficult task for many and so the curriculum taught is difficult to understand and to comprehend. The cost of for a year of education is \$500 which includes tuition, books, supplies, physical education uniform, shoes, use of computer and library, and the services of a tutor.

Other Education Programs include: Junior and Senior high school scholarships: 93 students are in the main schools and 16 are enrolled in University. Funds are also provided for teacher professional development. There is a contract with the Ministry of Education to improve the quality of education in Guatemala, working together to provide quality training for their people.

How can you get involved? Anybody can get involved to help build technical schools through the "*Buy a Brick*" program. School supplies are also needed and the "*Pennies for Pencils*" program has been set up for this purpose...\$1,100 has been raised so far in the Canmore Community! A program for music has also been developed to raise funds which are needed to buy used instruments. Donations for a general or specific project are always welcome and tax receipts are provided for amounts over \$25. Out of a donation, 90% is put into the program: 10% is used for administration costs for Hearts and Hands Foundation.

Over **500 volunteers** have visited from Canada to Guatemala to help the Mayans. A cultural exchange is also available through the Hearts and Hands Foundation. Each trip costs about \$3,000 and a tax receipt for \$2,400 is given for this life-changing opportunity. This fee covers airfare, hotels, local transportation, accommodation, meals and tours.

Further note added on volunteering:

Groups to Guatemala are usually kept to 22 – 24 people per tour; accommodations are in hotels or smaller establishments in the mountains; there are 4 in-service meetings of about 2 hr/session to discuss logistics and the culture before volunteers leave on their trip; a binder with information is provided; sign-up is with a \$500 non-refundable deposit; it is possible for parents to go with their older children (around gr 9/10 and up), but not recommended for very young children. High School student groups have made trips to Guatemala. See Hearts and Hands website or contact one of the board directors if you would like further information on volunteering or donating.

