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October 2020

Dear Friends of Centro Maya Project,

Every fall I send you a letter with updates on the wonderful changes you have made possible in San Juan La Laguna Guatemala. I want to begin with the hope that each of you is in good health. We are working together to prevent the spread of Coronavirus and trying to meet the challenges facing us. We are resilient even as we teach our children from home, pick up our groceries at the curb, care for our neighbors, read books and spend quality time with our families as we work from home. We have opportunities to enjoy forgotten hobbies, try new recipes and discover new birds who share our world. Our friends in San Juan have faith they will have enough food for their children and hope their children can go back to school full time soon and they will stay healthy.

Covid-19 in San Juan

Bob and I have been unable to visit San Juan since January. The Guatemalan government took active steps to stifle the spread of the novel coronavirus. It restricted all methods of transportation. This included closing the airport, eliminating bus, tuktuk, car and pedestrian traffic between cities and reducing boat traffic. Hotels and restaurants were restricted or closed. Banks and food markets had reduced hours. Masks were mandatory and social distancing and hand sanitizing were expected. Curfews were put in place. The most difficult curfew was Friday 4 pm until Monday 5 am, since Sunday is the most important market day. Police also monitor the number of people allowed into food stalls. Violators incurred fines and quarantines. Measures were strict but effective. Very few verified cases of Covid-19 were identified in San Juan. Now most of the curfews have been lifted in San Juan. The airport is open for residents and emergency travel. Several bus companies are operating with limited schedules.

Centro Maya Project

PO Box 263, Bettendorf, Iowa, 52722-0005

CentroMayaProject@gmail.com

www.CentroMayaProject.org

Family Food Program

Centro Maya Project began as a program to provide food assistance for families with children who were not receiving adequate nutrition. The program has grown from 3 families to an average of 25 families over the last 17 years. Covid-19 has had a severe economic impact on people throughout the world and Guatemala is no exception. San Juan is reliant on tourism. Government transportation closures eliminated that source of income. Food scarcity is real. During the summer we were supplying 95 families with corn, beans, oil, salt, sugar, eggs, powdered milk, rice, soap, hand sanitizer, toothpaste and fresh vegetables. In August, the Department of Health decided the day before the food distribution the Covid-19 risk was too high and it could not be held. Maria and Benedicto took the perishable food to schools giving it to children for their families. People living in mountain villages have fewer resources. For this reason Centro Maya Project has altered our program to provide food assistance to many of these families. We are hoping in November coffee will be ready to pick and family incomes will improve reducing the number of families we are supporting.

Emergency Medical Aid

Centro Maya Project offers medical care when families do not have other options. You may remember our young friend Roberto. At age 7 he was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). After months of chemotherapy he went into remission and was able to return to school. His story is on our website. Sadly, I just found out his leukemia is active again. He is traveling to Guatemala City 4 times a week for chemotherapy treatment. We hope his recovery will be rapid. Our intention is to provide the assistance he requires to become healthy again. Roberto, like most 12 year-olds, loves soccer, playing with friends and going to school.

Hearing Aid Program

Lucia, our hearing aid assistant, continued to work with patients providing evaluations, dispensing batteries and answering questions from her small home. The medical clinic reopened with limited hours allowing her to return to work. The airline closure has prohibited me from sending more hearing aids. The need is great and our waiting list keeps growing. It will be exciting when we can match a hearing aid with a new owner.

Mountain Water Program

Progress on our Water for Mountain Villages Project has been delayed. Engineers Without Borders have been unable to send volunteers to supervise and manage the construction. Community workers are clearing the site exposing new springs, preparing for the team to arrive. This project will take a few years. After waiting a lifetime the residents believe the day they will have access to clean water is near.

School Tuition

El Fondo Para Mi Escuela, the school scholarship program, found solutions to the first set of closures. Fortunately all of the students' school supplies were distributed in January before the virus became a problem. Private schools provided online classes for students. Unfortunately few students have home computers and WIFI. The library offered hours for student use to receive teacher instruction. Public school teachers made home visits with their students every week. Some schools gradually opened up for reduced class size instruction. Parents became more involved as they were able. Small study groups formed within families. Although it has been challenging, we still have several students scheduled to graduate this month. This program will continue again in January.

Your past support has made these programs available to the people in San Juan and the surrounding mountain villages. I keep my hopes high knowing the challenges, but giving up is not a choice. Your generous donations make a difference in the lives of children and their parents. Thank you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeanne Nakamaru". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Jeanne Nakamaru