

# Building Brighter Futures

FALL NEWSLETTER 2010

## Children Carry Books Where Cars Can't Go

Tropical Storm Agatha destroyed the dirt road to Chuialajquijquix, but it didn't stop the books from getting through. The village, which is as hard to reach as it is to pronounce, lies in a remote region of Guatemala, near the highland town of Santa Lucía Utatlán. It is accessible only by a steep, treacherous road.

In August, Child Aid launched a Mobile Book Box program in the area to enable a local librarian to deliver donated books to four neighboring communities. The schools in these villages, including Chuialajquijquix, have virtually no relevant books available for students, and literacy rates in the region are appallingly low.

"Our plan was to fill the boxes with children's books and drive them up to Chuialajquijquix," says John van Keppel, Child Aid's program director in Guatemala. "But when we got there, we discovered the road had been destroyed by landslides."

Even when the road is passable, Chuialajquijquix is too far from Santa Lucía for children to hike to the library on a regular basis. So Child Aid worked with Santa Lucía's librarian to create the Mobile Book Box program, allowing teachers in primary school classrooms to borrow up to 30 books at a time to use in their classrooms. Once the

boxes were loaded in Santa Lucía, the librarian had intended to deliver them to schools on the back of his motorcycle. That was the plan, anyway.

With the road out, van Keppel wasn't sure how the books would make it to the village. But this is Guatemala, where adversity seems to go hand in hand with resourcefulness. Within ten minutes, 20-plus children showed up to carry the books up the hill to Chuialajquijquix.

For the first time ever, all 65 children at the village's small school have storybooks in their classrooms. Chuialajquijquix is one of more than 50 communities that will receive books through Child Aid this year.

### REPORT FROM THE FIELD

## Against the Odds, Teachers Inspire New Readers

*By Danny Palmerlee, Child Aid Director of Development*

Teacher Luis Chávez walked over to a nearly empty table in the corner of his fourth grade classroom and returned with two thin, paperback books. One was a book of poetry in small print. The other was a storybook.

"The ministry of education requires that all children read five books per year," Mr. Chávez explained, "but these are the only books they give us. We have no others."

*(Continued on page 2)*

**53,000 books  
arrived in Guatemala  
in August, destined  
for Child Aid  
communities**

*Children carry Child Aid books up a storm-damaged road to Santa Lucía Utatlán.*



## Inspiring New Readers

(Continued from page 1)

During my recent visit to the highlands of Guatemala, this was the story I heard over and over again from teachers in rural communities. No books. No books. No books. Relevant, age-appropriate books in classrooms are very rare in this region, yet they are vital if children are to overcome the legacy of illiteracy that plagues poor families. Fortunately, in the communities where Child Aid works, this story is changing.

In Las Canoas, for example, I talked with Marcelina García, a primary school teacher who proudly showed me the “Star Reader” chart she created following a Child Aid teacher training session. “Victoria has read eight books *this month*,” she explained, “and Dinael has read five.” Most children in rural Guatemala read fewer than that

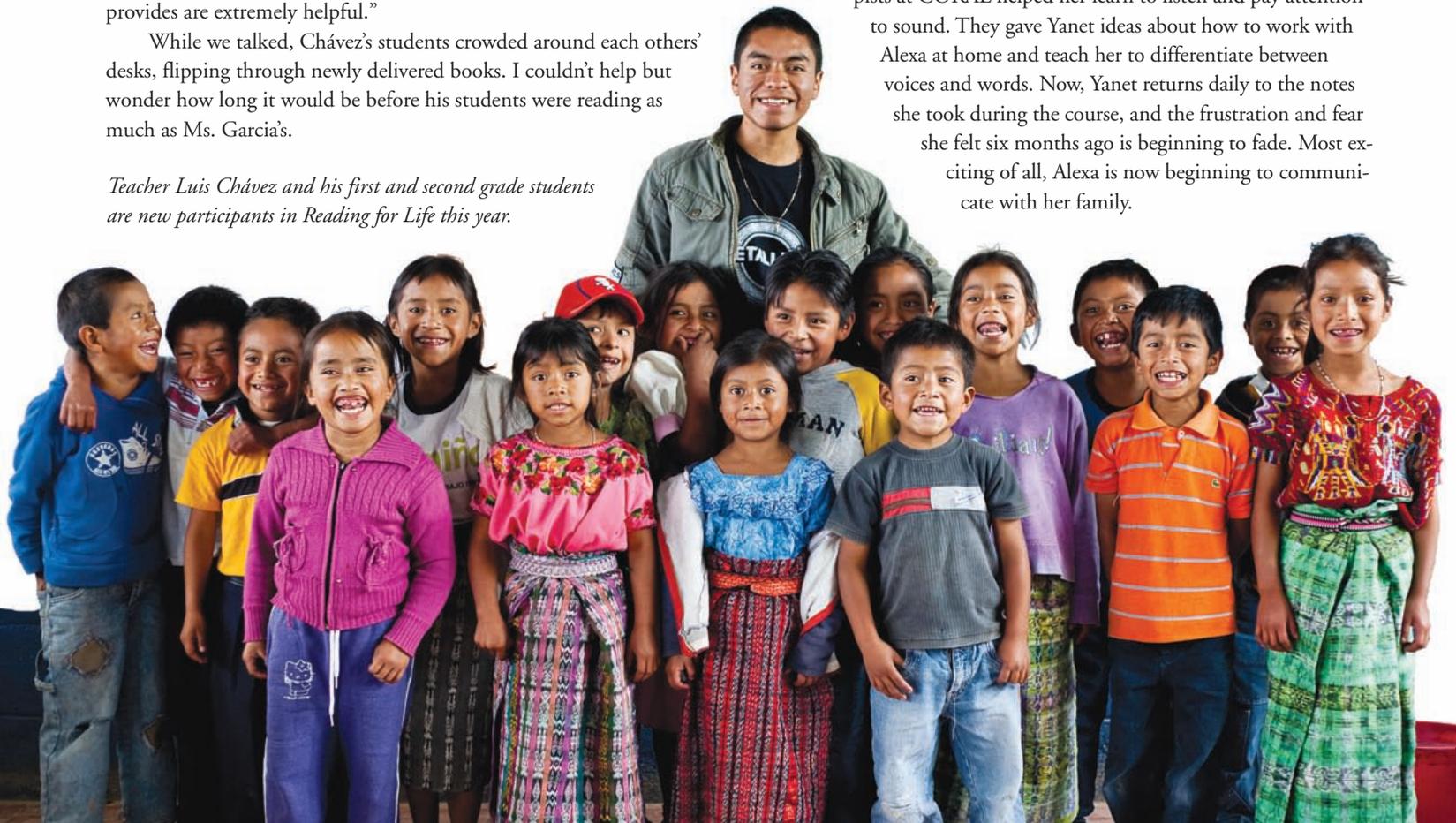
*per year*. Child Aid donated hundreds of books to Las Canoas’ library, and Ms. García checks them out for children to read in class or at home.

A similar transformation is underway in Mr. Chávez’ classroom, where he just received his first box of books from Child Aid (see story on front page). For most of his students, these are the first quality storybooks and picture books they have ever been able to hold.

“The Ministry of Education sent us some books, but they’re useless,” Mr. Chávez told me, pointing to a stack of outdated workbooks. “I don’t use them at all. But the books that Child Aid provides are extremely helpful.”

While we talked, Chávez’s students crowded around each others’ desks, flipping through newly delivered books. I couldn’t help but wonder how long it would be before his students were reading as much as Ms. García’s.

*Teacher Luis Chávez and his first and second grade students are new participants in Reading for Life this year.*



## MEXICO REPORT

### Hearing Program Helps Isolated Family

Last year, Alexa was diagnosed with profound hearing loss. In her community of Río Grande, Mexico, resources for hearing impaired children are virtually nonexistent.

Alexa’s mother, Yanet, poor and now distraught with the news about her daughter, had no where to turn. Then a friend told her about CORAL, an organization in Oaxaca City that offers hearing therapy and clinical services to poor families in southern Mexico.



Yanet and Alexa took the grueling ten-hour bus ride to Oaxaca to visit CORAL. There Yanet learned that Alexa needed hearing aids and hearing and language therapy. CORAL invited Yanet to join a program called “Therapy at Home,” a weekend program designed for

poor families who live far from the city. Through the program, Alexa received hearing aids, which her family could never have afforded. Yanet also spent one weekend a month at CORAL, learning about hearing loss and how to communicate with Alexa and stimulate her hearing and language skills.

After her weekend sessions at CORAL, Yanet came home with renewed energy, ready to play with Alexa, read her stories and teach her words. For Alexa, adjusting to hearing was difficult, and therapists at CORAL helped her learn to listen and pay attention to sound. They gave Yanet ideas about how to work with Alexa at home and teach her to differentiate between voices and words. Now, Yanet returns daily to the notes she took during the course, and the frustration and fear she felt six months ago is beginning to fade. Most exciting of all, Alexa is now beginning to communicate with her family.

**VOLUNTEER UPDATE**

## Portland Teachers Sponsor Community, Fly South to Lend a Hand

There is no better way to help transform a neglected school in Guatemala than to roll up your sleeves, fly south and do it yourself. This November, that's exactly what 16 retired teachers, librarians and school principals from Portland, Oregon will do.

The group will spend a week in the remote highland town of Agua Escondida to improve a dilapidated school. Most of the group will paint the cinderblock classrooms inside and out, while the team's trained librarians organize books that were brought in by Child Aid.

These experienced volunteers also donated enough money to Child Aid to support our *Reading for Life* program in the community for a full year. That means the town's primary school teachers and its



Volunteer Dick Saulsbury chats with local children in Chimaltenango.

librarian will receive extensive training from Child Aid's literacy staff, and hundreds of children will participate in regular reading activities. The team's impact will last long after the volunteers leave Guatemala.

Bringing resources to *Reading for Life* is a key part of Child Aid's volunteer program, which the Portland team helped us pioneer last year. "Working with Child Aid in Guatemala has given us the opportunity to improve the lives of many children there," says team leader Roger Capps, "And it's given us the opportunity to meet some very special people in a beautiful place."

### How You Can Help

- Donate to Child Aid by mail or online at [www.child-aid.org](http://www.child-aid.org).
- Tell a friend about us! We need to expand our circle of support.
- Become a fan on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/childaidliteracy](http://www.facebook.com/childaidliteracy) and invite your friends.
- Hold a fundraiser such as a read-a-thon, garage sale or special event. (Call us for materials and support.)

**LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR**

## A Community's Call for Help

Dear Friends,

In August, a representative from Xojolá, a tiny K'iche' village in the Guatemalan Highlands, approached Child Aid for the fourth time this year. He explained the situation again:

Their village has no library. Their tiny school, which serves 350 children, is completely devoid of reading material. Books are impossible to obtain. The teachers want to learn the techniques that Child Aid has provided to neighboring communities. The children who make it to sixth grade lack the skills to succeed in the middle school located an hour's walk away.

The photo you see below is a handwritten petition, signed and fingerprinted by the village's teachers, its mayor and its community leaders. The town has cleared a small building and designated it as a library. Now they just need Child Aid's support — and *you*.

The commitment and drive that we've seen from people in Xojolá is precisely what we look for when partnering with a community. We do not want to let this opportunity — these bright young children — fall by the wayside. But we need your help.

Child Aid must raise an additional \$18,000 this year to bring *Reading for Life* to Xojolá. And yes, we need to raise tens of thousands more to support our work in 36 other communities. If we can raise these funds by December, we can help Xojolá create a community library; stock it with quality children's books; help the town hire and train a librarian; start reading programs for Xojolá's children; and provide ongoing literacy training to the village's 14 teachers.

I know Guatemala is far away. I also know it is hard to imagine a town without books, where children are denied the fundamental opportunity literacy brings. But this is the reality for children in Xojolá, as it was for the 7000 children in other towns and villages who now participate in *Reading for Life*.

Your donation today will make a world of difference in the lives of these children. Thank you for your generous support.

Warmest regards,

Sam Hendricks, Executive Director



IN BRIEF

Scholarship News

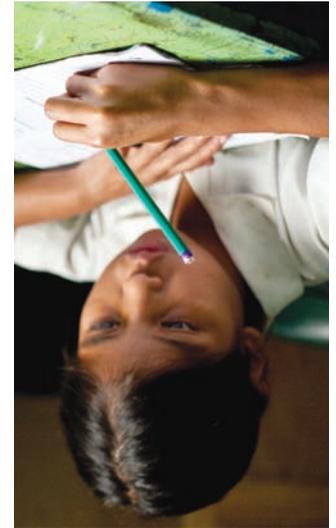
We are pleased to announce the naming of the Ethical Bean Scholarship Fund, Child Aid's scholarship program in El Tejar, Guatemala. Ethical Bean Coffee, a Fair Trade Coffee company in Vancouver, BC, began funding the program in 2004. Today it provides full scholarships to over 100 elementary school children each year. We are proud to have Ethical Bean as a partner. To purchase Ethical Bean coffee, visit www.ethicalbean.com.

Book Report

This year, Child Aid has shipped over 82,740 Spanish-language children's books to Guatemala. We are distributing them to rural schools and libraries in more than 50 communities. Shipping and distribution of these books was made possible through financial and on-the-ground support from Rotary Clubs in La Conner and Anacortes, Washington, as well as a grant from an anonymous corporation. The books themselves were generously donated by International Book Project, Capstone Press and International Book Bank.

What We Do

Child Aid works with indigenous people in some of Latin America's poorest communities to create opportunity and alleviate poverty. We deliver thousands of books to rural Guatemalan schools and libraries and offer scholarships to children who need them most. We provide extensive training for teachers and librarians and bring lives of thousands of poor children. We also provide therapy, support and schooling for deaf and hard of hearing children in one of Mexico's poorest regions.

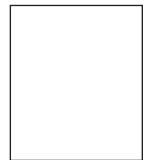


Mariana writes in a reading workbook, one of the tools Child Aid provides to rural classrooms. Before receiving our donated books, her teacher had only the local newspaper to read to her students.



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Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope...the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.

—KOFI ANNAN, Nobel Peace Prize Winner

