A Library Opens, A Dream is Realized

It is hard for us as North Americans (who have well-stocked libraries and mega bookstores to peruse) to understand what it is like for a rural Latin American community to get its first library. For the impoverished coffee-growing town of Pasac, in Guatemala’s Central Highlands, the recent opening of a library is a dream come true.

The Pasac library opened its doors in August with the help of three organizations: Child Aid, Bridge Builders and Café Femenino. Child Aid worked closely with community members who provided the land, manual labor, furniture, and a portion of the materials. Thanks to the support of Planet Wheeler Foundation (see p7), our staff is providing critical training for the new librarian, Alberta Guarchaj, and delivering hundreds of books. These include a set of encyclopedias, dictionaries, math and science books and children’s literature.

To appreciate how important this event was for the people of Pasac, one should know what’s typical in Guatemala. Classrooms there are usually void of books; homes have none because there are rarely bookstores in the villages; and even if a bookstore can be found, books are far too expensive for most working families to afford. If donated books do arrive in a community, they are treated as gold, often locked behind counters or in desks so no one can access them. They are often preserved for posterity and not to be used.

Child Aid’s goal is to get books into the hands of the children. We promote the creation of open stacks so children can peruse the books, and we help with cataloging so books can be found in the right place when needed. Libraries supported by Child Aid are encouraged to check-out books and circulate them in their communities, something that is virtually unheard of elsewhere.

In Pasac, the original dream was for a library, but new and bigger dreams will come of this one... dreams of children learning to read, dreams of education and opportunity, and hope for families who seek to replace poverty with prosperity and security. ■
Directors Note: A Growing Need

My name is Sam Hendricks, and I would like to introduce myself as the new Executive Director of Child Aid. I have only been in the director’s seat for a few months, but in that time I have learned much about the work of this incredible organization. This summer I toured many of the Guatemalan villages where our literacy programs are underway. I saw signs of great need as well as great change: teachers lining up to receive precious books for their classrooms; children deeply engaged in community reading programs; and rural libraries opening their shelves to families who value education and who seek a path out of poverty for their children.

One day I traveled to the coastal village of Monterrico to observe Child Aid staff conduct a workshop for primary school teachers. The aim of the training was to learn and practice lesson planning for our childhood reading program. It was brutally hot out, and an official school vacation day, so one might expect a low turnout. Instead we arrived to find over 60 teachers lined up to participate in the session – twice the number that had registered. Word of the event had spread to neighboring villages, and teachers from nine different schools made the trip on their own time and with their own money, hoping to get in.

Fortunately, we were able to squeeze everyone into the training room, and the teachers seemed eager to practice the new techniques. I asked one teacher why she came and she said, “my students don’t have any books to read in the classroom, and our town doesn’t even have a library.” She was clearly excited by the knowledge, resources and support that Child Aid offers underfunded schools and communities.

That day I witnessed firsthand the passion and commitment shown by teachers in some of Latin America’s poorest communities – men and women striving to learn and to bring that knowledge back to their students. I came to understand that illiteracy in Guatemala creates a deep well of need, one that our staff and our community partners struggle every day to address.

Child Aid Wins 4-Star Charity Rating

Did you know that over 90% of Child Aid donations go directly to programs that serve the needs of Latin American children? This means that your money doesn’t fund senseless bureaucracy, slick ad campaigns or fancy offices. With Child Aid, your support goes directly to programs that improve the lives of thousands of children each year. In recognition of this fact, Charity Navigator, the nation’s largest independent charity evaluator, awarded Child Aid four stars, its highest possible rating, again in 2009. We are proud to have received this tremendous vote of confidence.

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”
~ W. B. Yeats
2009: A Year of Challenge and Opportunity

We wish you could meet some of the children we have come to know this year, or witness the unshakable dedication of our Guatemalan and Oaxacan partners: there is Blanca, the rural librarian who tirelessly visits eight schools a week with stacks of books in hand; there is Oxim, a sixth-grader who spends her recess time reading stories to her younger sister from books provided by Child Aid donors; and there is six-year old Efraín, the first low-income child in the state of Oaxaca to receive a Cochlear Implant. His successful operation opened a world of sound to a boy diagnosed with profound hearing loss. (See Efraín’s story on page 5).

These people, and many others, bring purpose and passion to our work. Their stories are a few snapshots from a much bigger picture. In the last six months alone, Child Aid has:

- Brought reading programs into the classrooms of more than 8,400 students
- Provided literacy training to more than 307 rural teachers
- Given librarians in 36 rural communities the training, materials and support they need to establish their libraries as reading centers
- Distributed over 10,000 books to schools and libraries throughout the country
- Provided scholarships to 113 impoverished students
- Provided critical hearing services to 1,712 individuals

Volunteer Corner

Alaska Town Rallies for Mayan Village

What can one community do? This is the question that Davey Lubin asked himself after visiting Guatemala and seeing the poor state of the rural libraries there. After attending the language school, PRO-BIGUA, one of Child Aid’s partner organizations, Davey went back to his hometown of Sitka, Alaska and rallied the community to make a difference.

Child Aid helped identify a community in Guatemala that was ready and well positioned to expand their library and create a literacy program. The town of Santo Domingo Xenacoj had plenty of interest and drive – all they needed were resources and training. From there, the community of Sitka took the Guatemalan community into their hearts and raised $10,000 through a variety of fun and unique fundraisers – everything from bake sales, dinners and read-a-thons, to root beer float sales and even an adult spelling bee!

The relationship between these communities didn’t stop there. A group of ten students from Sitka High School went to Guatemala this summer, lived with local families, and got to see the rural mountain town where their efforts will make such a difference.

So what can one community do? They can provide books, training, scholarships and, above all, hope for hundreds of poor children. Child Aid extends our sincerest appreciation to the people of Sitka for their generosity and vision!
Child Aid cofounder and Board President, Nancy Press

Guatemalan Boy Finds Hope Through Reading

When Randy graduates from the vocational school where he is studying tourism, he will be the first in his family ever to receive the US equivalent of a high school diploma. His father had to start working in 5th grade, and today earns about $7 a day making bricks by hand. His mother was unable to complete 3rd grade and, like most Mayan women, cannot read.

Randy and his family live in the rural community of El Tejar, Guatemala. Like the rest of rural Guatemala, most children here never finish elementary school. Unlike the rest of Guatemala, El Tejar has a school-break reading program, a good library and a scholarship program which help children succeed in school. All are made possible by Child Aid donors.

For anyone who supports international development work, the question is bound to come up: Is my support really making a difference? In the case of Child Aid’s effort to bring education to some of the world’s poorest children, one only has to look to Randy for an answer.

As a young child, Randy was rarely read to. Few homes in rural Guatemala have books, and neither his classroom nor the library had anything resembling story time. Five years ago, Randy attended Child Aid’s first Adventures in Reading program in El Tejar’s library. He fell in love with reading and, after Child Aid helped the librarian establish a book lending program, began checking out and reading books on his own. Meanwhile, Randy was able to continue through middle school thanks to a Child Aid scholarship.

When the second and third year of Adventures in Reading began, Randy became a volunteer assistant to the librarian. He began leading activities associated with the books being read and, after a few sessions, he was even reading to the younger children. Randy was a natural leader, and working as an assistant gave him skills he is applying to his professional training today.

Without the presence of Adventures in Reading and the scholarships he received, Randy might have been forced to drop out of school before 6th grade and take up the arduous, low paying work of brick making. Instead, he is learning a profession that will help him support himself and his family, and have a life beyond mere survival.

In other words, yes, your support makes a difference. Considering Randy is only one of hundreds of Child Aid scholarship students and thousands of children in our larger Reading for Life program, it is a very big difference indeed.

Child Aid Cofounder Wins Achievement Award

Child Aid cofounder, Nancy Press, won Sarah Lawrence College’s prestigious Citation for Achievement award this June for her 21 years of humanitarian work in Guatemala and Mexico. Nancy is an alumnus of Sarah Lawrence, and past recipients of the award include author Alice Walker and White House Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel.

Nancy, who teaches medical anthropology at Oregon Health & Sciences University, cofounded Child Aid with her husband, Richard Carroll, in 1988. Nancy says that when she and Carroll founded Child Aid, “Our simple but deeply held belief was that it was not lack of talent but lack of opportunity that was trapping generation after generation of children in poverty.” That belief compelled Nancy and Rick to roll up their sleeves, pull their $10,000 out of savings and partner with committed local people to found a clinic for poor, deaf children in Oaxaca.

Since then, the organization has rounded up thousands of supporters and distributed millions of dollars in cash and in-kind donations to improve healthcare and educational opportunities for the poor in Guatemala and Oaxaca, Mexico. During its 16 years in Guatemala it has helped Guatemalans create 34 community libraries and 16 computer centers, and it is bringing reading programs to thousands of children in the poorest regions of the country.

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A few weeks ago Efraín Bautista Martinez became the first low-income child in Oaxaca (one of Mexico’s poorest states) to receive a Cochlear Implant, a revolutionary prosthetic hearing device that replaces the functions of the outer, middle and the inner ear.

Efraín, who just celebrated his 6th birthday, is a student at the Hearing and Language Rehabilitation School operated by CORAL, an organization founded and supported by Child Aid. With the help of Child Aid donors, CORAL provides testing and audiology services to thousands of children who live in the city of Oaxaca and surrounding rural communities.

Efraín was diagnosed with “profound auditory loss” when he was just eight months old. His parents, Remedios and Pedro, were deeply affected when they learned their son could not hear. They committed themselves to finding help in an area where few if any services exist for hearing-impaired children. When they heard that CORAL helps extremely poor children get the services and support they need, they brought Efraín in and began a relationship with the clinic and school that would last for years.

The medical attention and rehabilitation therapy Efraín received during his early years gave him the constant auditory stimulation he needed to be considered a good candidate for the implant. Today, Efraín is ready to experience a new world of sound. We are proud of Child Aid’s role in this landmark event, and we wish Efraín and his family our warmest congratulations.

While Alejandro’s home life remains difficult, he has found a refuge and a place of growth in CEDIN, and this will help him succeed in school in the years to come.

Children at CEDIN, a Montessori-type preschool and longtime Child Aid partner.

Efraín Bautista Martinez and his mother, Remedios.

Therapy Program Enables Landmark Operation

Child Aid Preschool Meets A Special Need

Alejandro (not his real name) is five years old and faces incredible hardships at home in the central Guatemalan town of El Tejar. His parents live in extreme poverty, and their struggle to make ends meet means Alejandro receives little attention. When he came to a preschool sponsored by Child Aid he was every bit the young rebel, letting out his inner frustrations by disrupting class. Fortunately, the teachers at CEDIN (the Center for Holistic Education and Development) knew just what to do for Alejandro.

CEDIN is a very special Montessori-type preschool and one of Child Aid’s closest partner organizations. Nearly all of the children at CEDIN come from families so poor they cannot afford the costs of sending their children to public school (uniforms, transportation, supplies, etc.) Thanks to Child Aid donors, children like Alejandro receive scholarships to attend the school, where they learn to read at an early age.

Because of CEDIN’s high teacher-student ratio and its methods of teaching, Alejandro received a lot of positive attention. He was exposed to constructive activities that enabled him to channel his emotions. Music, art, games and story-hour all created an environment just right for his growth and personal development. Alejandro even had access to a psychologist who has been able to coach the teachers on how to help him channel his destructive behavior into constructive actions.

After a year and a half in CEDIN, all the teachers and the psychologist conclude that Alejandro is better adjusted. He has fun and gets along with his classmates. He no longer argues with the teachers, and he eagerly participates in new activities.

While Alejandro’s home life remains difficult, he has found a refuge and a place of growth in CEDIN, and this will help him succeed in school in the years to come.
Librarians Reach Out, Students Give Back

Blanca and Luis are the hardworking librarians in Chicacao, a poor, rural community in the Guatemalan highlands. After taking part in Child Aid’s librarian training program, they set up book-lending and reading programs in their library and labored tirelessly to get reading programs into local schools. Now, on top of everything else, they are visiting nearby communities and teaching other rural librarians the skills they have learned. This is a perfect example of sustainability and a huge success for Child Aid. However, it goes even further.

As Blanca and Luis spend more time helping librarians and teachers in other communities, they have less time to spend on the reading programs in their own library. Enter the scholarship students.

Rosa and Hilario receive Child Aid scholarships that allow them to go to school. Their families make very little money, and without the scholarships, the children would be working to help their parents put food on the table.

In exchange for the scholarships, the students must volunteer five hours each week as librarian assistants in the community library. Initially, they took care of administrative duties like re-shelving and checking out books. Now that Blanca and Luis are spending more time in other communities, they are learning how to run the reading programs themselves.

“Not only are the assistants engaging with the children as teachers,” says program director John van Keppel, “they’re developing leadership skills that will help them in school and in life.”

For Child Aid, this development is exciting on many levels. Local librarians are taking our programs to other communities on their own; outreach is occurring from the ground up; and children are going to school and learning skills that they would otherwise never acquire. We owe this success to Blanca and Luis, to the assistants and to you, for supporting our programs!

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”
~ Winston Churchill

Donors Offer Path Out of Poverty

It is a sad fact that the Guatemalan education system does not offer children the basic skills needed to improve their lives. Only 42% of children who start school finish elementary school, only 24% finish middle school, and only 9% finish high school. The numbers are even worse in indigenous communities. Most Mayan children never make it past third grade, and the highest number of dropouts occur when children are seven or eight years old.

At Child Aid we believe education is the way to create true opportunity for children. By focusing on literacy and working directly with librarians and teachers to support children’s learning year after year, we take an efficient and sustainable approach to affecting real change.

When you give to Child Aid, you give knowledge, opportunity, power and the promise of a brighter future to the children of Latin America.
Noted Winemaker’s Donation
A Vote of Confidence

Ronni Lacroute, co-owner of WillaKenzie Estate, one of Oregon’s premier wineries, is as passionate about making a difference as she is about making wine. Rather than laying off migrant workers following harvest season, Ronni keeps a staff of about 25 people on the payroll year-round. Her winery provides healthcare for all, and even hires a mobile dentist to do everything from check ups to root canals. She also ardently supports several nonprofit organizations, which she believes make a real and honest impact.

In her giving, Ronni makes Child Aid a high priority. This year, she increased her annual donation fivefold, to become Child Aid’s single largest contributor. “My experience with Child Aid is that it’s not a big bureaucracy, but a group of select individuals doing valuable work.” Says Ronni. “I feel very good about giving to this organization because I know what’s being done on the other end.”

We consider this gift to be a huge vote of confidence in our work. It is also, according to Ronni, a powerful message to other Child Aid supporters. She is challenging others to increase their giving too, at a time when Child Aid’s programs are in high demand and growing rapidly.

“I get sick of flashy organizations that send you something every week,” says Lacroute. “I give to Child Aid because it does so much. The money goes to effecting children’s lives in a very direct way.”

Lonely Planet Founders Discover Child Aid

We are thrilled to report that the Planet Wheeler Foundation recently awarded Child Aid a $54,000 grant, allowing us to expand our Reading for Life program to five more rural communities in Guatemala’s Central Highlands. The Foundation was started by Tony and Maureen Wheeler, founders of Lonely Planet Publications. Combined with funds from Child Aid’s supporters, the grant allows us to bring reading programs into the lives of more than 7500 primary school students in the first year alone. These are children who have never had reading programs in their classrooms or library before. We will provide extensive training to the local librarians and help them start book lending programs, and we will provide in-depth training to over 150 teachers. Planet Wheeler Foundation’s generosity, matched with that of our other supporters, is having a tremendously positive impact on entire communities. Thank you!

Culture Corner

The Father of Magical Realism

Miguel Ángel Asturias (1899–1974) was a Guatemalan novelist and diplomat who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1967. His most famous work is The President (El Señor Presidente; 1947), the story of life under a brutal dictatorship in a fictional country resembling Guatemala. Men of Maize (Hombres de maíz; 1949), widely considered Asturia’s masterpiece, explores the effects of modern society on traditional Mayan culture in the early 20th century. Asturias’ use of the surreal and fantastic within everyday life have lead many to deem him the father of magical realism.
What do these children have in common? You. Inside, learn how your support is changing the lives of these children – and thousands more.