In This Issue

• Spotlight on Juan
• Change
• 16th Collaborative EI / Amigo’s Mission Trip

In This Issue

SPOTLIGHT ON JUAN (The Boy in the Red Shirt) by Scott Pike

Juan was visibly nervous, tense. I could almost see him thinking, “Why have I been singled out to be alone in the classroom with my teacher, the principal and my mother? Am I in trouble?” He was probably wondering if it had something to do with the 2 gringos who showed up this morning and were out on the playground with the other students.

And, there was that book. The one about Helping Children Who Are Blind that was sent to his teacher last spring. “This must have something to do with my vision. I know I don’t see like my friends.”

Every year on our trips to Ixcán, Guatemala, one patient stands out in my mind. This year it is “The Boy in the Red Shirt”, Juan. (Read the previous articles about Juan at our website, www.enfoqueixcan.org) Due to an early childhood infection, Juan had considerable damage to his retinas and his vision was reduced to about 20/160. He was handicapped in the classroom, having to sit very near the chalkboard, yet still struggling to see his lessons.

Reading was another problem. He could do it, but with great effort. It took Juan more time to complete his work, but his teacher showed us that his writing was very neat and done carefully. He is a good student. This demonstrated to us that he is a smart boy. In spite of his visual limitations, Juan has the patience to take the time to do his work correctly.

What happened next relieved his mind that he hadn’t been singled out today for punishment, but to receive help with his vision. When the gringos came into the classroom they had some gizmos to play with that helped him to see the chalkboard and to read easier. Indeed, the binoculars Dr. Closson gave him brought a smile to his face as he called off letters and pictures the principal was pointing to on the wall. And, with the hand magnifier he noticed an immediate improvement for his close work tasks.

The damage to Juan’s retinas when he was very young means his sight will always be compromised. However, he has a good mind, full of curiosity and a determination to learn despite his handicap.
With the help of his new low vision aids and his understanding teachers, Juan’s potential in school just shot up.

Donations to Enfoque Ixcán create stories like Juan’s. With your generous support more people will have their lives changed through clearer, more comfortable vision. Send your check in the enclosed envelope or donate online at our website, www.enfoqueixcan.org.  

THANK YOU!

CHANGE

by Aaron Wiens, OD

The saying goes that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

That was true during my most recent trip to Guatemala with Enfoque Ixcán. I originally traveled to the region with Dr. Pike back in 2004 as the student leader when I was still in optometry school at Pacific University. I had really wanted to return to serve in this region again since my first trip, but life happened and it took 14 years for me to return. But I’m so glad I was given the opportunity to get back here.

A lot has definitely changed in the intervening 14 years. When I went in 2004, we took a quick 45 minute plane ride from Guatemala City to Ixcán and back. Now, the trip is made by van through the mountains and construction zones on a curvy road over about 11 hours. The city of Playa Grande has also changed over time. The main road leading to the church compound (parroquia) where we stay is now paved and more street lights illuminate the main thoroughfare. The parroquia itself has also changed. The electricity used to be shut off at night which meant no fans from 11:00 pm to 5:00 am. That meant hot, humid nights where you were hoping to make it to 5:00 am when the cool breeze from the fans would start to circulate the air again.

Yet with all those changes, many things have not changed. The generosity of the people who we get to serve and provide eye care for hasn’t changed. The Guatemalans in the Ixcán region are wonderful people. They are kind and generous. It was common to get a handshake or hug from a patient after helping them find new glasses or after giving them eye drops to help with their discomfort. My Spanish has improved greatly since the last time I came. And while still FAR from fluent, they graciously put up with my attempt to speak their language.
And the commitment to serve this area by Dr. Pike and his team has not changed. That is one of the main reasons that I wanted to return to this area and with this organization. I have gone on a number of other trips to underserved regions in other countries where we would go and see patients and tell them they had cataracts or glaucoma, but there was no way for follow up to make sure they received the necessary long term care that they would need. But because of the commitment that Enfoque Ixcán has to the region, and the connections that Dr. Pike and his team have set up over the course of many trips to the area, the people who need care get the care they need.

One thing that will definitely change for me is that it won’t take another 14 years for me to return to help serve these wonderful people. I can’t wait to head back soon.

16th COLLABORATIVE EI / AMIGOS MISSION TRIP!

For the 16th consecutive year Amigos Eye Care, www.amigoseyecare.org, and Enfoque Ixcán, www.enfoqueixcan.org, joined together to complete a successful eye care mission trip to Ixcán, Guatemala. In mid-August 8 optometry students, 5 optometrists and 3 other volunteers spent 4 very busy days seeing patients. Two days were spent in the region’s main trading town of Playa Grande and on 2 days we traveled to the villages of Las Rosas and Ingenieros, where we worked mainly with the school children. The temperatures were hot and the humidity high, but it didn’t slow the team down as they examined 1,050 people and dispensed 557 pairs of glasses and a couple hundred sunglasses.

This year we tried out a portable lens edger (this cuts lenses to fit into frames). The edger was a donation from Amigos Eye Care. The 2 opticians with us taught our eye health promoters (EHP) how to use the machine and 14 pairs of glasses were made on the spot, saving time and money for the patients. Our EHPs will continue to use the edger as they work with patients throughout the year. This is a big step toward making our project more self-sustaining and offering better service to our patients.

Another innovation on this trip was the introduction of low vision care, eye care of those folks who have subnormal vision due to accidents, disease or congenital eye problems. A low vision specialist, Dr. Christi Closson, was with us this year. Dr. Closson treated 3 patients with significant low vision problems, with gratifying results. You can read about one special patient on page 1 of this newsletter.

In addition to the eye exams and glasses, 43 patients were found who need eye surgeries. The eye health promoters took 30 people to the surgery clinic the last week in September. Twenty cataract surgeries were performed on this trip, funded by your support of Enfoque Ixcán.
You can be very proud that your support and donations are helping so many people to have important and much needed eye care services. We are proud of and thankful for all our donors for making this project successful for the people of Ixcán, Guatemala.

Here are the folks who made this a great trip: Dr. Brian Arvidson, Dr. Christi Closson, Dr. Jona Johnson, Dr. Aaron Wiens, volunteers Grace Closson, Ryan Cummings and Dwight Fleck, Optometry students Amir Ghanipour, Michelle Lee, Kate Muramoto, Mareena Roufail, Megan Schmauder, Milena Stefancovic, Kara Webster and Tesi Wyszomirski.

We appreciate your support and encourage you to help us continue to provide eye care services to this underserved region of Guatemala. You can donate on-line at www.enfoqueixcan.org or send your check in the enclosed envelope. THANK YOU!!