



FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN

EYE CARE AND EYE HEALTH EDUCATION FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE IXCÁN REGION OF GUATEMALA

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BREAKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

By Milena Stefanovic (trip #2—class of 2020)

Guatemala is a country that attracts you for being “exotic” with its rich colors and lush, engulfing landscapes. But you find yourself coming back for the people.

A man waits in line, sits in one of the wooden chairs to have his eyes checked. A farmer, like many, he does not stand out until a light is shined in his eye and



Foreign body removal

there’s a speck. What happened to your eye? “Something went in a couple of days ago.” This something is a piece of metal, stuck in the cornea, the front surface of the eye. This grown man, in his mid-forties, sits in a small wooden school desk as one person crouches over him with an instrument to remove the piece of metal and the rust that has begun to form, another to his right shining light at his eye, and a third is in front of him translating, talking to him, providing encouragement. I am in awe of this man’s composure. He is a wonderful example of the fortitude that these people have. After a few minutes, the piece of metal is removed. The rust is gone. Words of thanks and handshakes ensue. He is given antibiotics and

lubricating drops to help with the healing.

Two women sit on a bench to get their eyes checked as a little girl whirls around them. Her inquisitive eyes wide open as she leans in, inspecting grandma’s eye exam. Then carefully watching mom’s exam. She smiles when it’s her turn, jumps on the bench. She keeps her eyes still, without a complaint, bright lights scan her eyes looking for anything out of the ordinary. She’s very excited. What a novel experience!

A 12-year-old girl listens to broken Spanish, explaining that glasses will help her eyes relax hopefully relieving her headaches. “Entiendes?” Do you understand? She smiles, puts her hand out and wobbles it: so-so, “Sí. No, pero sí”. Your words aren’t right, but I know what you’re trying to tell me. For any small effort that we put forward, we are met in kind. Sometimes more. This shows only some of the appreciation and kindness of these people.



Happy “whirling” girl!!

Our bus pulls up to a school, about 1.5 hr drive from our home base in Playa Grande. I don’t think it would be much of a stretch to say that the group is met with fanfare. There are welcome signs painted by little hands. The same hands that clap as our group walks through the school yard. We are greeted with speeches of thanks and a prayer. The hospitality continues throughout the day, as lunch is prepared, snacks are handed out, and cold coconuts for hydration are passed around.

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Enfoque Ixcán

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We are reminded yet again of the kindness of these people as they make sure we are taken care of. We watch the teachers take care of their students, ensuring everyone gets the care they need. We see a glimpse of the sense of community these people have.

Our group saw a lot of patients. I don't know how many. I could find the number somewhere. Numbers have their importance, but Help cannot be quantified. Personally, I count the trips successes with interactions: hugs, handshakes, "gracias"-es, and smiles. A smile because someone's world is clearer now with a pair of glasses. A smile because someone was told that their eyes are healthy. A laugh because your Spanish or your wild hand gestures are very entertaining, but definitely appreciated. All of this makes your heart sing and it breaks through the language barrier like nothing else. It connects us as humans, reminding us that we are the same, just dropped in a different part of the world.



Milena

NEW BOARD MEMBER

The board of directors of Enfoque Ixcán is happy to welcome a new member to our team. Dr. Jessica Lynch is an optometrist in Hillsboro, Oregon. She graduated from Pacific University College of Optometry in 2004 and is in private practice and the co-owner of Vivid Eye Care.

Jessica grew up in Ryegate, Montana (see if you can find that on the map). She has 3 nearly grown children and as she says, "a very patient husband." Her oldest son and her husband accompanied Jessica this past August on our mission trip to Ixcán. This was Jessica's second trip with Enfoque Ixcán.



Dr. Jessica Lynch

Her other professional activities have included being a member of the Oregon Board of Optometry for 6 years and she has worked as an attending doctor for one of Pacific University's optometry clinics. Over the years she has developed a strong interest in public health and this drew her to our project. And we're glad it did. Jessica is full of energy and ideas and will be an excellent addition to our organization. **WELCOME JESSICA!**

AGOSTINA *By Jessica Lynch, OD*

Agostina caught my eye while she was waiting in line for her first eye exam. She's a slight, 11 year-old girl from the village of Flor del Norte, in the Ixcán jungle region of Guatemala. I was there on my second trip with Enfoque Ixcán and Pacific University's Amigos Eye Care. I noticed Agostina because she was giggling loudly with her girlfriends. Agostina's father, Eleodoro, is a farmer in the village and she and her three brothers, along with her father, live in her grandmother's home. Agostina's mother died when she was six of a bacterial infection and now much of the household duties fall to Agostina.

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When it was Agostina's turn, I noticed that she had very reduced vision in both eyes. While the health of her eyes were normal, Agostina was quite near-sighted and unable to clearly see even three feet in front of her. She had never had an eye exam before and when I asked her how she was able to see in school, she responded that the teacher lets her sit in the front and is ok with her coming up closer to the chalkboard when she needs to.

I was a little nervous about finding a pair of glasses close to her prescription. While the Amigos group from Pacific brings hundreds of pairs of glasses, Agostina's case was not normal. After a lot of searching from our team opticians, we were luckily able to find a cute pair of glasses very near her prescription. When Agostina put them on, her eyes got wide and her hands went to her face! She was wildly looking around, beaming and exclaiming how clear things were! Agostina had no idea, until then, what she had been missing. She was completely overwhelmed, and so was I. It's these moments when I see a life change in a matter of seconds that keep me giving my time and resources to this organization. Through Enfoque Ixcán, we not only provide an eye exam and a pair of glasses, but we help to open up whole new worlds to others, like Agostina.



Jessica examines Agostina

SEVENTEENTH MISSION TRIP! *By Scott Pike, OD*

In August Enfoque Ixcán and Amigos Eye Care completed their 17th mission trip to Ixcán, Guatemala, in as many years. It was another successful trip!

In 4 days of clinics the team examined 803 people and dispensed 435 pairs of glasses. We also gave out dozens of artificial tears samples. Most of these people work in dusty, smoky, windy conditions, so dry eye symptoms are extremely common. To reduce their exposure to the ultraviolet rays of the sun, we dispensed about 300 pairs of sunglasses.



Crowd waiting for eye exams

The patients' ages ranged from less than a year to 88 years old. Two of the days' work were located at schools in remote villages and the other 2 days were at our centrally located base where we saw mostly adults.

Nearly 40 people were identified as needing cataract surgeries and 20 of this group have already traveled to a Guatemalan eye clinic to have the surgery performed. **That's 20 people who have had their sight restored.** Funds from our generous donors paid for these surgeries. THANK YOU!

I would like to thank the following doctors, students and other volunteers who made this such an enjoyable success:

Doctors Jessica Lynch, Faye Gamboa, Mark Price and Craig Bowen.

Students Rachel Bush, Ross Carley, Amy Neideffer, Krista Ballard, Andrew Price, Milena Stefanovic, Monica Baradi, and Amir Ghanipour.

Super volunteers Aiden Lynch and Jason Anderson.



Elderly patient gains eye comfort with sunglasses

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Seventeenth Mission Trip ... Cont'd from page 3

In 17 years we have had 204 volunteers make this trip and twenty-seven have made the trip more than once. We have had 128 Pacific University students volunteer their vacation time and use their own funds for this important humanitarian mission trip.

You can help too. Go to www.enfoqueixcan.org to donate now

Enfoque Ixcán and the wonderful people of Ixcán, Guatemala, thank you!



The Team of Doctors, Amigo's Members and Volunteers



Team members engage with young students



The Holiday Season is coming fast!!
**Remember to go to:
Amazonsmile.com,
select Enfoque Ixcán, and a percentage of each of your purchases will go to support El's mission. **
THANKS!