FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN

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

Volume 16 Issue 2 Summer 2020

CLINIC PROGRESS REPORT *by Scott Pike*

The moment we've been waiting for is almost here—nope not Christmas, but that's close! We're just about ready to begin construction on the Enfoque Ixcán vision clinic in Ixcán, Guatemala. We could only have come this far with the generous support of so many of you. It's good to have you on our team.

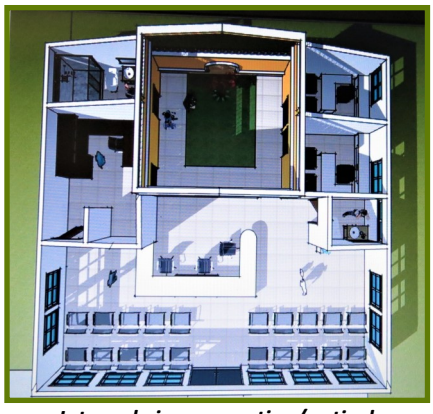
In the past month our board of directors has had Zoom meetings with our ***architect, Manuel Beletzuy,*** in Guatemala, and with each other, to iron out the final design plans for the clinic. Here you can see a couple of architectural graphics of the looks of the new building and the layout of the inside.

This first phase is for about 1350 sq. feet of floor space, which includes a spacious reception/optical area, a lab/storage space, a pretesting room, an exam room, two bathrooms and a small courtyard. We have 2 more phases on the drawing board to be completed over the next few years, when the patient volume increases and our budget allows.

This is going to be such a great improvement after spending the last 8 years with only a 120 sq. feet to work in. Our eye health promoters, Felipe and Carlos, will be more efficient and confident in their work and our patients will be so much more comfortable. The Ixcán region of over 100,000 people will finally have an eye care home where they can be proud to receive professional eye care.

And, each of you can be proud to be a part of this team effort that will help make life more productive and comfortable for so many deserving people. The board of directors is humbled by your generosity.

External view of the clinic



Internal view: reception/optical, testing, exam rooms and courtyard

Scott symbolically breaks ground for the new clinic.

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Enfoque Ixcán

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DONOR VOICES!

Over the last 23 years Enfoque Ixcán has developed into an important eye care project for the region of Ixcán, Guatemala. In fact, EI is the only access to eye care for the entire region of 100,000 people. The Board of Directors is very proud of all that we've been able to accomplish by bringing eye care to so many deserving Guatemalans.

But, when it comes down to the basics, we're equally proud of the donors who have allowed this success to happen. Donors are the life-blood of any non-profit and EI has been blessed with extremely generous, caring people who have funded over 630 cataract surgeries and over 9,000 eye glasses. It is very humbling to know that we have been trusted as a charity of choice among all the many non-profits doing good work in our country.

It's interesting to hear why people make gifts of their hard earned money. Well, here are some examples from our donor base:

"Thanks for all you do to change the lives of so many people by improving their vision and quality of life. God bless your team." ***William & Chelly—Montana***

Amigos students examine patients

"I am grateful for the opportunity to share my support of Enfoque Ixcán ("EI"). Scott and Joene Pike and the board of directors have a passion and commitment to EI's mission to restore vision to some of Guatemala's most vulnerable individuals. I have witnessed the phenomenal impact EI's modest budget has made to hundreds of lives. Restored vision enables people to learn and to engage in productive work, so local communities benefit as well.

Dr. Pike maintains close ties with the students at Pacific University College of Optometry who also benefit from hands-on practical experience during EI's/ "Amigos" clinical visits to Guatemala. Enfoque Ixcán's extraordinary efforts have earned the support of many individuals and organizations including Rotary International. I trust in our collective continued support and urge further generous, rewarding financial contributions." **Monica— CA**

A satisfied patient

"We have three primary charities to which we contribute. One is Enfoque Ixcan, another is our state humane society, and the third provides clean water technology in third world countries. All three have something in common in that they assist the most needy and vulnerable. There can be few things as rewarding as giving the gift of improved sight, and the work done by Enfoque makes a huge impact on the people it serves. Giving to Enfoque is extra rewarding since even though there are ways to check the efficacy of most charities, there is a special feeling of satisfaction giving to an organization managed by people we know." **Bill & Catherine—AZ**

EI patients - successful cataract surgeries

"Initially we heard about EI from my sister who had traveled to Guatemala with the Pikes, but after meeting Scott and learning more about the project, we knew we wanted to help. We could see they were making a big difference in the lives of these hard working people who had been through so much. It is remarkable how one pair of eyeglasses or a small surgery can totally change a life and we are glad that we can be a small part of it."

Elizabeth & Bruce—Pennsylvania

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Donor Voices … Cont'd from page 2

"It is a privilege for me to support Enfoque Ixcán because of its important work of providing access to eye care to a much underserved rural population that would otherwise suffer with conditions that often are treatable and that negatively impact an individual's dignity, educational opportunities, and ability to provide for one's family. Over many trips to Guatemala I have met some of the people who have had cataract surgery through Enfoque Ixcán and who now have returned to happier and more productive lives. I support Enfoque Ixcán because it's a charitable organization in which a single donor has the opportunity to make a real impact in someone's life because the funds are used so efficiently. I also admire the fact that it trains and employs local people as eye care promoters who screen individuals and accompany them to treatment, thus helping to overcome their fears and reassure them through the process. And of course I especially appreciate the humanity, vision and integrity of EI's founder." ***Brenda—Massachusetts***

Enfoque Ixcán encourages you to exercise your philanthropy. There are many organizations to choose from when donating to charity. I hope you'll think of Enfoque Ixcán as one of your charities of choice. Your support will be a gift with a far reaching impact. (Look forward to more "Donor Voices" in our next newsletter.) To donate, visit our website at: https://enfoqueixcan.org *(while there, read about Dr. Pike being honored by Pacific University with the 2020 Outstanding Alumni award!)*

COVID-19 STRIKES GUATEMALA

by Alexandra Durbin

Covid-19 has severely impacted Guatemala's health care system, economy, and society, exacerbating the country's existing poverty, malnutrition, and inequality. The country is officially registering about 1,000 new cases per day, and about 1,500 Guatemalans have died of Covid-19.

The government has ordered strict measures to attempt to contain the infection. Borders, schools, and parks are closed; public transportation is halted; and gatherings of any size are banned. Curfews keep the population inside from 6pm to 5am daily and all day on Sundays. Mask use in public is required.

While the restrictions have somewhat slowed the spread of Covid, the government has failed to implement a parallel policy to mitigate the social and economic impacts of the crisis. About 70% of Guatemala's population works in the informal sector, without a steady salary or benefits, relying on their day-to-day earnings in market stalls, corner stores, and farms. Many have lost most or all of their income. People hang white flags outside of their homes to indicate that they need food, or red flags if they need medicine. The federal government's aid program has been inadequate and poorly implemented. Non-profit agencies have launched soup kitchens and food deliveries.

Guatemala's public health care system, already underfunded and underequipped, is on the verge of collapse. At overcrowded hospitals, waiting rooms and hallways have been turned into Covid treatment areas, with patients lying on the floor. Health care workers often must provide their own personal protective equipment. At one coronavirus-designated facility in Guatemala City, the Health Ministry has not paid clinicians for four months. Many Guatemalans prefer to suffer illness at home rather than risk the appalling conditions at public facilities.

Although the Ixcán officially has only about 100 Covid cases so far, the region faces severe challenges as the caseload grows. The regional coronavirus clinic is a refitted tailors' shop that lacks ventilators and other essential equipment.

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COVID-19 Strikes Guatemala … Cont'd from page 3

Access to clean water is key in preventing Covid-19 and ensuring good health overall, yet only 14% of people in the Ixcán have piped water in their homes. Others must haul water from rivers, streams, and wells, then boil or filter it for consumption.

Worldwide, differences in educational quality during the pandemic are revealing and replicating underlying inequalities. In rural Ixcán, most people do not have computers or internet service, so virtual learning is not an option. About 80% of Guatemalan public school students have done no schooling since March.

Amidst the challenges, the Ixcán has strengths for weathering this pandemic. The region has fertile land and abundant waterways. Many farmers in the Ixcán planted extra corn, beans, rice, and other staples this year to ensure their food security in case of eventual shortages or transportation difficulties due to Covid.

Mask & sanitizer sales in a Guatemalan community James Rodríguez/mimundo.org photo credit

The region's history epitomizes collective strength and endurance. Ixcán's inhabitants carved communities out of the remote jungle, survived a state-led genocide, and continue to protect their lands against exploitative mega-projects. Many Ixcán communities are tight-knit, organized, and supportive. The people of the Ixcán are drawing on their historical wisdom and ongoing resilience to confront this current crisis.