



# FOCUSING ON IXCÁN

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

Volume 17 Issue 1

Spring 2021

## EYE CARE EDUCATION

by Scott Pike

José is 19 years old, and he is blind. He lives in a remote, mountainous part of Guatemala called Barillas, about 3 hours by bus west of Enfoque Ixcán's office in Playa Grande. José's blindness was a result of a lack of health care services and eye health education.

It started when José was born 3 months premature. Because babies' lungs aren't fully developed by that time, they are given oxygen. However, too much oxygen can have a detrimental effect on the development of the eyes. It's called Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP). According to his parents, "José spent a long time in an incubator and received oxygen." The oxygen saved his life, but left him blind, with detached retinas.

Nowadays the development of excess retinal vessels in babies born prematurely, caused by oxygen, is carefully monitored in premature infants. When, and more importantly where, José was born there were no intensive care units for babies and the knowledge of ROP was of less consideration than keeping the baby alive.

In Barillas there was no access to eye care for José and his parents, and his parents lacked the money to travel to find the care José needed. What makes this story even sadder is that his parents weren't informed about the problems the extra oxygen might cause to José's eyes and that if treated early the loss of sight might have been minimized. Effective screening and early treatment are most important in preventing associated vision loss for patients with ROP.

One of the goals of Enfoque Ixcán's mission statement is to provide eye health education to the people of Ixcán. Cases like José's make that piece of our work so important. We provide training workshops to the nurses who serve the villages of Ixcán to teach them about common eye conditions.

Most of the people of Ixcán work out-of-doors on farms so eye injuries are common. Dust, dirt and smoke are normal eye irritants so patients with red eyes from infections and allergies come to our office regularly. Our eye health promoters (EHPs) receive training on how to care for these problems.

It's also important that the eye health promoters take information out to the villages, to the village nurses and to the schools, for the teachers and the children. They teach eye health prevention as well as treatment options. The better informed the public is about eye care, the better their eye health will be.

Equally important is making sure our eye health promoters know what they don't know.

We have an excellent eye clinic we refer patients to for eye surgeries and for those problems and conditions which our EHPs are unsure of, or know are beyond their training and abilities.

Nineteen years after José was born and afflicted with ROP his parents heard about Enfoque Ixcán. They brought him to our office last fall to see out if there might be something we could do to improve his vision. They were 19 years too late in



## In This Issue

- Eye Care Education
- We Honor Our 2020 Donors
- Bequest Giving
- Win, Win, Win

## Contact Us

ENFOQUE IXCÁN

5784 SE Lexington Dr

Hillsboro, OR 97123

503.277.9711

Enfoqueixcan@aol.com

Visit us on the web at  
[www.enfoqueixcan.org](http://www.enfoqueixcan.org)

*Jose with his parents*



**2020 HONORED DONORS**

***We are so humbled by the support of our incredible donors. We are excited to see new contributors and feel blessed by those that have supported our eye care project for many years. You are each considered as a hero to those in the Ixcán needing eye health support. The numbers in parentheses, indicate the number of years each supporter has contributed to EI over the last dozen years. Thank You All!***

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*Eye Care Education .....Cont'd from page 1*

seeking help, and we were 19 years too late in educating the nurses, parents, teachers and community leaders.

A young person handicapped by blindness is unfortunate. José's blindness may have been treatable, but access to eye care and eye health education prevented any possible treatment for him. Northwestern Guatemala is a remote, rugged and isolated region. Not only is access to care very limited, but access to services for blindness are nearly non-existent. Jose has attended school, but imagine the difficulties he has had learning in a seeing environment. Imagine the difficulties he has had walking where there are no sidewalks, only uneven, narrow and often rocky paths.

José has a difficult life ahead, without many options for learning, working or contributing to his community. Loving care of his family and friends will have to be enough. But, Enfoque Ixcán can provide his family with ideas and reading materials to help make his life easier.

Equally important, Enfoque Ixcán can do all in its power to educate the local health professionals about conditions like José's so that others will have access to the care necessary to prevent and treat serious eye problems. Your donations will help our EHPs carry the message to all the people of Ixcán. Thank You.

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*Do you want to insure the sustainability of Enfoque Ixcán for generations to come?* If you're interested, please consider including Enfoque Ixcán in your will or estate plan. Simply speak to your attorney and supply the following:

Our legal Name is Enfoque Ixcán                      Our tax ID # is 01-0844437

Our Address is Enfoque Ixcán, 5784 SE Lexington Dr, Hillsboro, OR 97123

Your bequest will support our mission for years to come. Questions? Contact us!



To see the progress of our new clinic, check out the photos on our website: [www.enfoqueixcan.org](http://www.enfoqueixcan.org)



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Page 4

## **Become a monthly donor and win, win, win!**

From funding life-changing cataract surgery to helping a child discover the world with their new glasses, Enfoque Ixcán helps change lives. We're excited to help even more people in 2021, and we hope you are too. If you're resolved to help the Ixcán people, we've got an easy way to do it: [join our compassionate group of monthly givers-Friends of Enfoque.](#)

As a Friend of Enfoque, you are very important to our success. In fact, you become the backbone that sustains our work. Monthly giving is more than just kind, it shows that you are a practical thinker too: you know that giving monthly allows us to spend less time fundraising and more time helping people see. And in the end, that's what it's all about.



**Become a Friend of Enfoque during the month of April and you will be entered into a drawing to win a beautiful new Guatemalan blanket. Every Friend of Enfoque will have a chance!**

To join, go to [www.enfoqueixcan.org/support-us/](http://www.enfoqueixcan.org/support-us/)

**(This blanket is a representation of the blanket offered in the drawing)**