

FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN

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

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NEW CLINIC PLANS

Thanks to our generous donors we have raised enough money to build our new clinic in Ixcán, Guatemala. On our August trip I met with the administrators at the public health office to discuss the next step, actually doing the construction. Our clinic will be adjacent to the new hospital which is currently under construction. They expect to have it completed in the later half of next year (2015).

Most of the mess of the

hospital construction should be cleaned up by next summer, as they begin work to complete the inside of the building. This is when we would like to start our construction, hopefully in July. Our construction is expected to take about 1 month.

The location is approximately 2 kilometers from our current office and on the edge of town. The hospital location will offer us a convenient and easy-to-find place to call

home. In addition, we will have the safety and security of being close to other health care facilities.

The Ixcán public health officers are as excited as we are to have our clinic serving next to theirs. I'm eager to share with you our progress as the planning and construction begin. We will show you how the clinic is coming along in future newsletters and at our web site, www.enfoqueixcan.org.



Scott and EHP Arnulfo (right) with public health administrators Nery and Ciriaco



Hospital construction in progress

BABY CLOTHES

We all know that babies need a lot of clothes. They have a way of constantly outgrowing them. Now, if you're set up to serve hundreds of very poor families with babies, you could use tons of baby clothes. A group of 3-4

Catholic sisters operate a clinic for mothers and infants in the building where we live and work when we're in Ixcán.

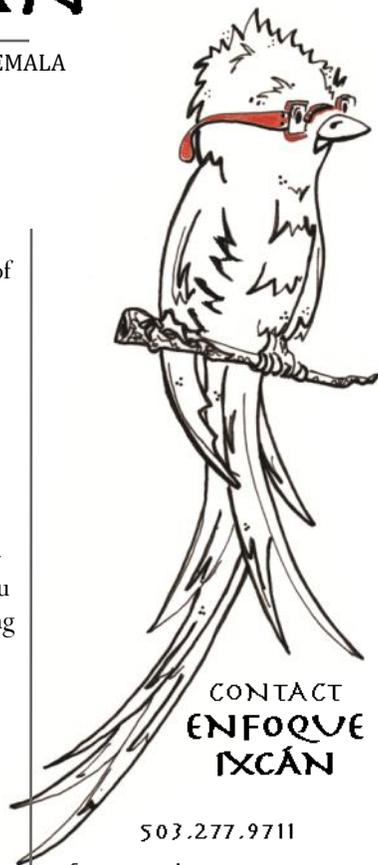
Many years ago when Enfoque Ixcán and Amigos Eye Care began collaborating on mission trip to Ixcán, Guatemala, the optometry students had the wonderful idea to pack all the empty spaces of their boxes of glasses and equipment with padding made up of baby clothes. As time went on,

sometimes a couple of boxes were packed only with baby clothes. This was the beginning of a tradition.

Each year Amigos presents the sisters with as many clothes as they can bring, but it's never enough. This year sister Emelina accepted the gifts with great joy and many hugs and "thank yous." Her gratitude created a few tears of happiness for the optometry students.



Sister Emelina and the 2014 Amigos team



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OLD FRIENDS

We had another “old friend” visit us while we were in Ixcán for our annual August trip. I was busy dispensing glasses to patients on our first day of clinic, when he suddenly appeared before me. It was Manuel de Jesus Garcia. Manuel first came to us in 2007, concerned about his declining vision which was due to cataracts. We sent him to have cataract surgery and afterward his eyesight was much improved, to the point where he was able to continue to work his crops (beans and corn) and take the harvest

to town on his own on market day. He and I had breakfast together in 2008, when he found me to thank Enfoque Ixcán “for giving me my vision back.”

After a few years of not seeing him, I worried that he may have passed on. But, there he was standing before me (all 88 years of him), looking as healthy and well as he had 6 years earlier. Once again he had come to offer thanks to Enfoque Ixcán and all the people who had donated to make his surgery possible. The gratitude of

BY SCOTT PIKE

Manuel is a sentiment we often receive from the people of Ixcán. But, in the case of Manuel, “thanks” means more. He reminds us of the importance of our work, by telling us he “can even see the color of his grandchildren’s eyes now,” and that “being able to continue to work gives me a reason to live.”

I wasn’t able to visit long with Manuel, but it was certainly good to see him again. Not only is eyesight precious, friends are too. As Manuel said on leaving, “Gracias a Dios!”



Manuel de Jesus Garcia

UNFORGETTABLE GUATEMALA

BY CAITLYN CAMPBELL

Unforgettable. One word that barely describes our fantastic Guatemalan journey!

This past August, a group of 6 amazing optometry students and myself from Pacific University traveled to Guatemala. This trip was such a unique experience because we were able to live with the people we were serving.

The area that we served was in the Ixcán region of Guatemala and is about an eight hour drive by bus (depending on the driver) to get to from Guatemala City. We stayed at a church in the town of Playa Grande. The accommodations were way better than I was expecting! I was bracing myself for outhouses, ice-cold showers and lots of bugs! We actually had toilets that flushed. The showers were cold, but refreshing after our long and sweaty clinic days.

our departure that he had found a great new restaurant for our trip – and to not worry! We were all a little skeptical so we packed a stash of granola bars, protein drinks and other snacks just in case. We were in for a pleasant surprise. The restaurant owners, Ruth and Velvet, did a great job and treated us with a different meal every day. The Guatemalan diet is a little different than our gringo bellies are used to; it consisted of a lot of carbs, sugar and way less protein than we usually eat. A few members of our team did get sick during the trip; so Pepto Bismol and Imodium were our friends!

We had a total of four clinic days, two of which were at the church and the other two were at local schools. The days at the church were busy. People were lining up at five in the morning. We worked twelve

hour days – the line just never seemed to stop!

The local schools were a lot of fun and definitely allowed us to perfect our optometric skills. The kids were so fascinated with what we were doing that they huddled in the doorways just to watch us. Our team consisted of four doctors, four 3rd year students, three 2nd year students and three local eye health promoters. We saw a total of 1,369 patients and dispensed 632 pairs of glasses!!

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Getting ready for the day

Dr. Pike informed us before

CONTRASTING WORLDS

BY BRADLEY JANSEN

Students at Pacific University College of Optometry become members of the AMIGOS Eye Care program so they can travel to other countries and help provide eye care to individuals who would otherwise go without. AMIGOS is a non-profit organization affiliated with the college that makes these eye care mission trips possible.

Every year, Dr. Scott Pike invites several AMIGOS student members to accompany him on his annual summer trip to Guatemala to work with Enfoque Ixcán. This past August I was fortunate enough to assist Dr. Pike and other members on the incredible journey.

When I first heard about the trip to Guatemala I had thoughts of getting to sample foreign food, become more proficient at the skills I learned in my first year of optometry school, and maybe even a little sightseeing.

And while I did get my fill

of the local dishes and managed to do a little sightseeing at the end of the trip, I definitely got much, much more. I gained confidence with two difficult optometric skills (direct ophthalmoscopy and retinoscopy), learned some conversational Spanish, formed new friendships, and strengthened relationships with student colleagues, practicing optometrists, and the amazing Guatemalans who worked with us.

But enough about me! As great as the trip is for optometry students, it means a whole lot more to whom we provide eye care. Similarly to how Americans wait in long lines in the predawn hours for the newest iPhone to be released, many less-fortunate Guatemalans were lined up outside the clinic before we even awoke for breakfast to wait for an eye exam. Even in the heat and humidity the lines would hardly shorten throughout the full workday.

Two of our clinic days we

travelled to different local primary schools to see students. One of the school’s classroom windows consisted of chain link fence instead of windows and was missing the chain links in some places. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw that the missing link was replaced with barbed wire!

In many ways, this helps to illustrate the sometimes contrasting worlds that Americans and Guatemalans live in. And yet, despite the many disadvantages that the people seem to face, they never seem to complain, but were only ever thankful and positive.

While waiting for our ride home some of the children and members of our team kicked a soccer ball around. One of the trip highlights was watching the universal game of soccer connect us all and seeing everyone laughing and having a good time.



Bradley Jansen

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UNFORGETTABLE GUATEMALA CONTINUED

We also referred 53 patients for professional care. We were an incredible team and came together to tackle this astounding number of patients. Even in the times of stress we were able to smile and just kept working together to serve the people of Ixcán.

Probably one of my most memorable highlights of the trip was riding in the back of a pickup to get to the schools

we served. Fifteen of us piled in the back of the truck along with all our supplies. The majority of roads we traveled on were not paved so we were in for a bumpy ride! The locals couldn’t understand our excitement in riding in the back of a truck, for them it’s a normal way to get around.

We were generously given the opportunity to stay two nights in Antigua to finish off our trip. It was two more days to

enjoy each other and form more wonderful memories. We ate like kings, toured the beautiful city and shopped for souvenirs. What a contrast from the Guatemala we had previously experienced! The streets were made of cobblestone, and there were colonial style buildings and churches throughout the city. We ended our journey with a holiday!

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IXCÁN NURSES TRAINING

An important part of the mission of Enfoque Ixcán is to provide eye care education to the people of Ixcán, Guatemala. In the past we have provided the primary and middle schools with lesson plans on eyes and eye care. We have made brochures available to teachers and the general public describing eye conditions and symptoms of eye problems. On our August trip this year, we held a workshop for the nurses of Ixcán.

With the aid of a Power-Point presentation created for this event, Drs. Scott Pike and Hoang Cao presented information to 27 nurses who work in villages throughout the Ixcán region. After cov-

ering some basic anatomy to be sure everyone was on the same page, considerable time was spent showing slides of various eye condition which the nurses may encounter in their villages. Emphasis was placed on identifying bacterial and viral infections, ocular allergies, cataracts, eye injuries and corneal problems.

They were an engaged audience. Many questions were asked during, and after, the 2 hour presentation. In addition to eye conditions, suggestions were given on testing techniques, the history taking aspects of testing and how to keep relevant records.

The program was organized by the local Ministry of Health office and Felipe, our eye health

promoter. Ten eye charts were left with health office for use in the villages. More could be offered to the nurses (2 hours is little time), but it was hot and they had a busy schedule, so more will be presented on future visits.

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Dr. Hoang Cao presenting at the Ixcán nurses training