

# FOCUSING ON THE IXCÁN

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

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1

MARCH 2014

## LOOKING FORWARD...

The February Ixcán trip is usually about planning for the future. This year was no exception. Our Eye Health Promoters (EHP) are improving their skills with each passing month, so the day to day work at our office in Ixcán needs less and less attention from me. I saw 13 patients while I was there, but most of them came in so I could verify their need for cataract surgery. Felipe is planning a trip to the surgery clinic next month. He has 25 patients lined up so far.

*Here's a quick rundown on how the trip went.*

Ali Durbin (board member) and I had a meeting with an attorney to discuss Enfoque Ixcán becoming non-profit certified in Guatemala. He assured us this is a necessary step as we move forward with plans to build a clinic in Ixcán. As this process may take as much as a year and a half, we will start as soon as possible.

I had a meeting with our friends at Visualiza, the clinic which does our surgeries for us in San Benito, Petén. Their business manager is also an architect and we worked out a building plan for the proposed new clinic, including a cost estimate and construction crew

ideas.

Next was a meeting with officers from the Guatemala West Rotary Club. We discussed their proposed collaboration with 4 Oregon Rotary clubs for a Rotary grant to fund equipment and supplies for our proposed clinic. We hope to have that grant ready for submission by mid-year.

Along with Pedro, Felipe and Arnulfo, our EHPs, Pat Rumer, a friend from Portland who speaks Spanish fluently, and I had some meetings in Ixcán.

We met with the Mayor of Ixcán and his counsel to bring them up to date on our successes in 2013, to offer our thanks for their help in transporting patients to surgical care, and to ask for further assistance in 2014. They will be voting on our proposal in mid-March. The Mayor extended his deep appreciation for the wonderful service we offer to the people of Ixcán, something they have not been able to provide privately or publicly.

Another meeting was with Apolonio Gonzalez, the school supervisor in Ixcán who helps us during our August trip when the Amigos Eye Care optometry students join us. Apolo-

nio will arrange visits to two schools in remote villages. We have worked with Apolonio for 12 years and have visited over 21 schools and villages.

A final meeting was with the Ixcán area Ministry of Health office. The administrator and chief doctor were called out to attend an emergency meeting in Guatemala City, so we met with 2 of their assistants. We discussed our planned clinic building and the work of Enfoque Ixcán. Last year this office offered a piece of land to build our clinic on. The land is located where they are building a new hospital. We were able to go to the hospital site which is currently being cleared for construction. Before we left, one of the assistants acknowledged that after 10 years of eye care service, Enfoque Ixcán has more prestige and local support than the government health clinic. I'm sure he was being generous and kind, but we have been more consistent than most Guatemalan government services in the region.

We'll be telling you more about our clinic building plans in the weeks to come.



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Scott with the administrative assistants at the Ixcán Health Office

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## SLEEPING WITH MOSQUITOS

The Dalai Lama said, "If you think you're too small to make a difference in the world, try sleeping with a mosquito." That's how I like to frame our success in 2013.

In 2013 Enfoque Ixcán examined 1426 people. We accomplished this with the wonderful help of our eye health promoters Felipe, Arnulfo and Pedro, plus 20 volunteers (7 Guatemalans and 13 from USA) and all of our donors.

Our eye health promoters accompanied 112 patients to the eye surgery clinics, where 91 eye surgeries were performed on 81 people and funded by Enfoque Ixcán. Of the eye surgeries 57 were for cataracts. That means that 52 people are now enjoying their new and improved view of their world. They are now able to see their family and friends. They are now more independently mobile. They are

reading again. They are contributing to their communities in more active ways. Their quality of life is improved and they live with more dignity than they had before the surgeries.

Also in 2013, more than 75 Ixcán students became better able to study and learn comfortably with their new glasses. Another 450 adults received glasses allowing them to advance or begin leadership positions in their communities and churches.

All of this happened because of our generous donors, who contributed over \$22,000. In the USA, the 57 cataract surgeries alone would have cost about \$170,000. We were able to fund the surgeries and pay for food and lodging for the patients traveling to the eye clinics. In addition, we paid for the eye health promoters' ex-

penses and contract salaries, sent them for 3 days of training in July and covered the cost of rent for our office space in Cantabal.

Our donor dollars go a long way! Over 95% of our donations go to patient care. And, we're still growing. The Ixcán region of Guatemala has about 100,000 people, so we've only touched the surface. Because over 80% of the population live in poverty, there are no eye doctors in the area. We are the only stable source of eye care.

To meet the demand for eye care services in Ixcán, we are currently raising money to build a clinic so that Guatemalan doctors can volunteer days during the year to help our eye health promoters test more people, dispense more glasses and

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Students waiting for exams



Cataract surgery patients

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## SPOTLIGHT: PATIENTS DIEGO AND ROBERTO

*Two gentlemen stopped by the Enfoque Ixcán office to share their eye care stories last month.*

**The first was Diego.** He is a tall, slender man, slightly bent from hard work and his 85 years. His language is Mayan K'iche and he originally was from a region south of the

mountains, south of here. He came to this region in 1969. This makes him an early settler to the Ixcán.

A year ago Diego was examined at Enfoque Ixcán and found to have a cataract in his right eye. His vision was reduced to 20/150. His left eye had suffered several episodes of trauma over his life and

had little vision. In the past he had been struck in the left eye, first with a fist (age 18), later by a sugar cane stock when working in the cane fields, and with a broom handle when he was cleaning in a church.

In May, 2013, he went with Felipe and group of



Diego

*Continued on page 4*

## 2013 ENFOQUE IXCÁN DONORS

*A very special thank you to all of the donors that supported Enfoque Ixcán over the past year. It is your generous support which make it possible to provide life altering support to the people of the Ixcán.*

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## SLEEPING WITH MOSQUITOS CONTINUED

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diagnose more people who need eye surgeries.

As the word spreads about our services, the demand grows.

We had a great year in 2013 and we expect 2014 to be even busier. You

can help! Please join our winning team of volunteers and donors as we aid these unfortunate neighbors. It's only chance that put them there and us here. We're supporting the people by dignifying them and allowing them to be a part of something on-

going and enduring. In this way we are creating a sustainable program.

Each of us, through Enfoque Ixcán, is making a difference in the world.



Scott and Ali with attorney Santiago Chuc



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## SPOTLIGHT CONTINUED

patients to have an Enfoque Ixcán sponsored surgery on his right eye. The doctors determined that there was too much damage to the left eye to recover any sight. The cataract surgery with a lens implant went well and he now has good vision in the right eye.

Diego has six children: two boys and four girls and somewhere between 25 and 30 grand children. His youngest grandchild, a girl about 2 years old, is one of his favorites and he likes her to visit him and play a bit.

We are delighted to have made Diego's life more meaningful.

### **The other visitor was a 67 year old man named Roberto.**

Roberto's language is K'iche also and he had his son with him to help with translation. He is a sturdily built man, nicely dressed in a pink shirt. About a year ago he stopped working in his fields due to his poor vision. He has also developed diabetes and a heart problem. When he walks he has to stop often to rest.

Roberto is in the Enfoque Ixcán office today so I can verify his need for cataract surgery. He came this morning from his village of San Antonio Chi-

quita, about 3 ½ hours to the west. He now spends nearly all his time in his house. He lacks confidence to move around on the uneven ground outside.

I confirm the severity of his cataracts (his best vision is 20/200) and Felipe talks with him about the next scheduled group trip to the surgery clinic, in March. With the cataract surgery he hopes to recover his eye sight and he's also hoping the diabetes treatment will improve his strength. He has four sons and nineteen grandchildren to keep up with and enjoy. He thanks us for our services and is looking forward to making the trip for surgery.



Roberto

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Enfoque Ixcán on  
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**EnfoqueIxcán.org**  
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