



2020



Annual Report



In this report you will read testimonials to see how some Planting Seeds Families are experiencing the pandemic, how we have responded and how you have all helped make this support possible. We also have included great news about the community center and a preview of what's ahead!



Dear Planting Seeds Family,

Thank you for another year of support! This year has presented many challenges to our preschools, community programs and the families we work with. Your commitment to our work has allowed us to push forward and meet the needs of so many families. We understand, as well, that this year has presented hardship for our supporters and our hearts go out to everyone who has been affected by the many difficulties of 2020.

Guatemala's school year began in January as we welcomed new and returning smiling faces in our preschools and community programs. As an organization, we were preparing for growth as teachers transitioned to academic coordinators, assistant teachers have been added to all classrooms and participants in our community programs transitioned to facilitators of those programs.

In March of 2020, Guatemala had its first case of COVID-19 and the country shut down. All of our preschools and community programs immediately closed and the families we work with had uncertainty about their risk for exposure as well as their employment and capacity to provide for their children.

Within three weeks, we transitioned our preschools to in-home education, adapting our curriculum and coaching parents through WhatsApp groups to take on the role of teacher for their kids. We provided phone cards to cover the cost of phone data so families could be in constant communication with the teachers and get all of the support they needed.

We also provided monthly food bags to the 85% of families in our preschools who had lost a significant portion or all of their income to the pandemic. In Zone 3 of Guatemala City, we helped launch an alliance with the Network of Organizations of Zone 3 and Volunteer Organization RESI to provide 700 food bags a month to families in need.

In April of this year, we launched our Emergency Relief Campaign to help pay for these added expenses. The support was overwhelming as we were able to raise the funds necessary to continue our emergency relief efforts through December! Planting Seeds Friends Circles hosted trivia nights, exercise events, raffles, markets, bake sales, virtual galas, and reached out to their contacts to ensure we were able to meet the needs of every family we worked with and more. THANK YOU!

For 2021, we will continue to adapt to the pandemic to meet the needs of the families we work with as well as continue our growth as an organization. We are so grateful to have you all as part of the Planting Seeds family to support us in this effort.

We wish everyone reading this the best of health and well being during these times.

Peace, Love and Solidarity,

The Planting Seeds Team



Family, education and pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world, causing millions of people to stay at home for months on end. Many families had to rethink their lives and adapt their spaces for work, study, and recreation within the boundaries of their own homes.

Such was the case of Gaspar Sucuqui, who lives in zone 3 of Guatemala City. He passed the lockdown in his house, which is also his workshop as a carpenter. During the pandemic, his home also became a playground that connected him on a deeper level with his children.

For two years, Gaspar has been part of the Planting Seeds Fathers' Group, a community program that aims to equip fathers with leadership skills to support their families and communities.

One of the most important aspects of this program is to guide fathers into an in-depth reflection about their childhood, which is done by pondering questions such as:

What is the best part of being a father? What is the most challenging part of parenting? How do you show love in your family? How can you be more involved in your children's education? Through these questions, fathers have a chance to reflect on their family relationships, decide how they want to raise their children, and become the kind of fathers they want to be.

Gaspar came to the Fathers' group for the first time in August of 2018. He found the experience to be profoundly enriching; he began talking about his emotions, which is not socially acceptable for men, and shared with other fathers the ups and downs of parenting. A year later, he became a group facilitator.

“Being part of this group is like being with someone you trust, where you can express yourself. That’s what I liked, because sometimes, as fathers, we do not always have a way to express our emotions.”

During one group session, Gaspar had a chance to remember his 16th birthday and recognized mistakes in his own fatherhood.

“When I was very little, my father was very demanding, and he would get upset often. When I turned 16, he came up to me and told me: Look, son, I know what I’m doing to you is bad, and I would like to be different. That is why I want you to forgive me. Whenever I remember that, I feel nostalgic. That day, I knew that I had a loving father.” Gaspar spoke of this episode of his life in the Fathers’ Group in a very emotional session. Returning to that moment was not in vain since Gaspar saw that episode reflected in his relationship with his seven children, four of them adolescents.

“Sometimes, after coming home from work, I was just giving orders and demanding things from my children. I felt there was distance between us. I thought that none of them wanted to talk to me. Now it’s different, we talk and we have a closer and more loving relationship.”

The change in his fatherhood was especially notable during the pandemic. Being more open to expressing his emotions and showing affection to his children made their relationship even better during the lockdown.

“I am a carpenter, and when the pandemic started, we made a chessboard, and we entertained ourselves playing together. We don’t have space to play with a ball, but we filled a sack with sawdust and hit it with a stick. We stayed at home, and we always had something to do together.”

During that time, he continued talking with the Fathers’ Group. Every Tuesday between 7 and 8 PM, they spoke through WhatsApp and shared audios and videos with reflections and experiences during the pandemic. For Gaspar, this group is a space in which fathers can rethink what masculinity means. For him having these dialogues can truly transform society.

“There is a belief that men should not cry. In our group, we try to rethink how that belief was given to us. We consider it important to break with that idea. Indeed, we cannot change overnight, but where there is a will, there is a way. Machismo does not have to reign our societies, and we might not be perfect parents, but we can always try to be better”.

Our community programs’ impact might sometimes feel intangible, but we genuinely believe that by nurturing individuals’ personal growth, we are fostering social transformation. Through our programs, parents and community members have a chance to break from negative patterns embedded in our societies, just like Gaspar broke free from the belief that men should not cry or share their emotions. Little by little, by healing our memories and nurturing our families to be more loving, we are setting the basis for a more compassionate and empathetic society.



Transitioning to remote education



Back in March, we closed the preschools' doors without knowing how long it would take to see each other again. Little did we know back then how social distance was going to transform our lives. However, soon enough, we realized that the pandemic was exacerbating inequality. About 85% of the families with whom we work lost their primary source of income due to the country's lockdown and social distancing restrictions, putting many community members at risk of food and housing insecurity.

Such was the case of Maria Lidia Velasco, a single mother of a Planting Seeds student. She lives with her four children, who are 18, 13, 9, and 7 years old. María Lidia makes a living from doing housework around her community. However, when the pandemic began in Guatemala, the people she worked for locked the doors on her to keep social distance. Having to procure for her four children by herself was incredibly difficult; fortunately, there was never a lack of food on the table because she received groceries from Planting Seeds.

In the midst of a very challenging situation, María Lidia found hope in her children's education.

Her eldest daughter graduated as a teacher this year. Her second daughter passed her grade successfully; the third one is a former Planting Seeds student, and he is now in 2nd grade in a public school. Her youngest daughter is currently studying at the "Garden of Dreams", the Planting Seeds preschool located in San Lucas, only 27 kilometers from Guatemala city.

This year, Planting Seeds teachers continued supporting students' education and emotional well-being from afar.

"My youngest daughter continued to study online during the pandemic. Sometimes she cried because she missed her classmates. But her teacher Carla sent her audios, stories, and videos that encouraged her and lifted her spirits."

As María Lidia and her children adapted to remote learning, she also grew to become a mentor for her children.

"At the beginning of the lockdown, it was tough to take the role of a teacher. I used to explain the school activities to my daughter, and she complained that I did not know to explain as well as her teachers at Planting Seeds. But little by little, and with María Fernanda's teachers' support and advice, I became more involved in her education. Now I feel more confident to explain the activities to her, and I am also learning to support my children emotionally during these times. Sometimes they feel bored or sad because we cannot go out, and I have learned to motivate them and propose different activities to do as a family."

As we mobilized to help our community in the middle of a global crisis, our supporters in Canada, the USA, and Guatemala stepped up to give us a hand. Through a variety of fundraising activities, we connected online with our wider Planting Seeds family. Various virtual events took place, which proved our community's strength: from trivia nights to yoga classes to a virtual gala and many other initiatives, our Friends' Circles gave us a hand, as good friends do during difficult times.

The acts of solidarity, friendship, and generosity of our supporters ultimately made it possible for Maria Lidia's little daughter and many other children to keep studying remotely.

We rest assured of knowing that we have grown stronger as an organization, despite the difficulties, thanks to the power of solidarity and community.





PSI Financial Overview

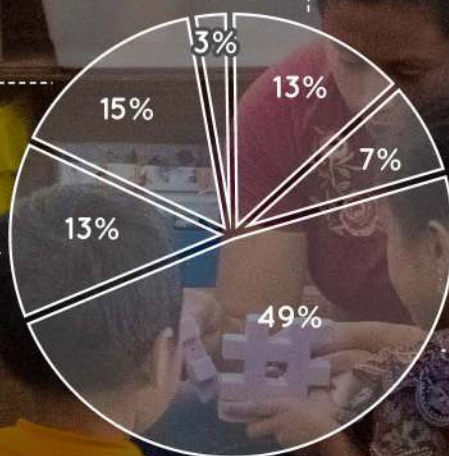
Expense Summary

Total Expenses as of 10/1/2020: \$129,474.92

Capital Campaign
\$ 3,823.58

Emergency Relief
\$ 19,529.77

Administration
\$ 17,214.50



Educational Supplies
\$ 16,880.59

Fundraising
\$ 9,060.76

Program Salaries
\$ 62,965.72

Program Numbers

Preschools

San Lucas	50
Sacala	23
Tioxya	8
Esperanza Renovada	60
REKKO	45
TOTAL	186

Community Programs

Fathers Nurturing	14
Motivated Women	15
Go Girls/Ballet	25
Breakdance	8
English	65
After School	20
Library	10
TOTAL	157



Overall Total: 343

Revenue

Friends Circles/Fundraising Events	\$ 66,562.56
Emergency Relief Campaign	\$ 31,824.38
Capital Campaign	\$ 90,876.56
Monthly Donors	\$ 13,839.30
Exchange Programs*	\$ 67,22.33
Misc.	\$ 4,761.36
Grants	\$ 4,476.00
TOTAL AS OF 11/1/2020	\$ 219,062.49

Emergency Relief

	Relief	Families	Total
Food Bags to Families in our preschools		70	630 Food Bags
RED/RESI - Zones 3 and 7 Food Bag Collaboration		700	4,100 Food Bags
Emergency Phone Data		100	2,020 Phone Data Cards

*Change for Change/Pen Pal/Dual-Exchange/Educational Tour
Full financial report will be available on our website in March of 2021

2021 and beyond

While we continue to focus on meeting the educational, emotional and economic needs of Planting Seeds families amidst the pandemic, we also continue to build and work towards our vision for the future.

We are excited for what lies ahead!



2021 Hybrid Education Plan

The Guatemalan school year will begin in February 2021, a month later than its normal start date. When students return, we will transition to a hybrid model that will include our in-home education plan that we implemented this year, with an in person component of small groups a few days a week. We are really excited about seeing the faces on our students and being able to support them in our preschools again.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, students will work in small 4 person groups with their teachers for an hour at a time. We will then wipe down the classroom and prepare it for the next group of students.

Once a month, we will add an additional day for parents to work in the small groups with the teachers of their children. These sessions will allow parents to get in person support and coaching from the teacher on their implementation of the in-home learning model.

PSI Growth and New Partnerships

With many organizations unsure about the future, Planting Seeds has been creative about how and when we expand our work. In 2021, we will begin working with Guatemala Youth Initiative to implement our in home education program with their teen mothers. We also plan to implement our preschool methodology with the organization Sueños in Antigua, Guatemala!

Additionally, the community facilitators of our Father's Nurturing Program in Zone 3 have been invited to lead a young men's support program with fellow organization CREAMOS.

In addition to these new partnerships, we continue to build our foundation to expand our work to more organizations and communities in the coming years.



Community Center: A second home

We did it! Through incredibly generous individuals, foundations and religious institutions and the hard work of the Board of Directors and Capital Campaign Committee, we have raised the necessary funds to begin construction in 2021!

In a community where the average house is 25 square meters, the space for a bedroom is the same used for the kitchen and the living room and, with no space for entertainment such as a patio or garden, many parents often opt to let their children go out to the street to play, leaving them in a vulnerable position to the dangers of the street. This need increased during the pandemic, where, due to a government lockdown many families spend their days inside their homes to prevent further infections.

As 2021 comes closer, the possibility of coming back to normality makes everyone feel enthusiastic, especially with the construction for the Community Center around the corner. In June, the first stone will be placed and with the support and work of the community, we will make a large step to proving a safe space for the children and families of zone 3 and 7 of Guatemala City.

In the first half of 2022, our Community Center will finally open its doors. Thank you to everyone who has helped make this dream a reality!

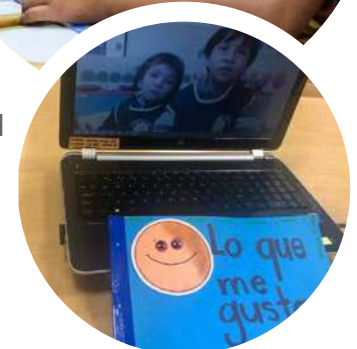


Future programs

The best way to witness our work's impact is by visiting and seeing our programs first hand; this is why we will be expanding our programs to cultivate intercultural understanding and connection through education in the next couple of years.

We are looking for new partnerships with high schools, colleges, and universities to receive students in Guatemala through educational programs. We are also exploring ways to connect elementary and middle school students in Canada and the USA with our Guatemalan students.

We hope to begin offering opportunities for Canadian and American supporters to visit us in Guatemala and contribute to our mission through service-learning trips and educational tours once the quarantine and travel restrictions loosen up. We will also be launching a sponsorship program to connect supporters and students on a deeper level while growing opportunities for reciprocity and exchange.



Thank you!

Almost two decades of fostering social transformation through education in Guatemala have been possible thanks to our friends' continuous commitment.

We thank everybody who enables and supports our work -- from our generous donors to every single volunteer who puts in the time and dedication to keep Planting Seeds going. We are so grateful to have all of you with us.

We want to shout out and celebrate the fantastic work of our Friends' circles in Canada, the USA, and Guatemala, who showed their solidarity to Planting Seeds by organizing a variety of fun and creative events to support our work throughout this year.

To all of you, thank you! We wouldn't be such a strong organization without your support!

Northbrook Friends Circle put on a virtual gala and a silent auction to raise awareness about the Planting Seeds methodology and how it contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty.



Ottawa and Pembroke's Friends circles in Canada stepped up with a cookie sale and a silent auction to support our early childhood education programs.

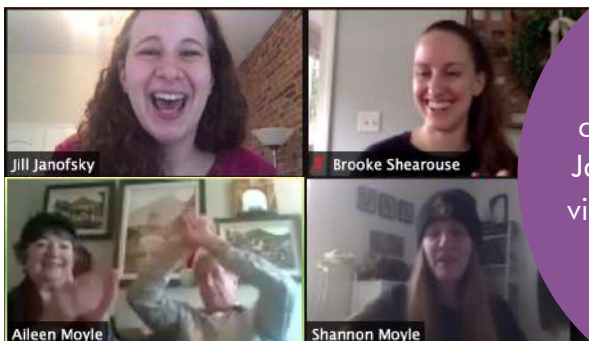
Traverse City and Suttons Bay friends in Michigan jumped to the moment to sell ornaments and help with our Emergency Relief Campaign



The Chicago Friends circle got us exercising with "Yoga for a cause", and with a holiday fundraiser to sponsor food bags for Guatemalan families in high need.



As always, Our Change for Change Team in Ottawa worked with multiple schools to raise necessary funds for our Early Childhood Programs



Our dear friend and continuous supporter, Jill Janofsky, gathered friends virtually for Trivia Nights to support Planting Seeds International!

Supporters Andrea Portillo and Moronike Laleye from Ottawa held multiple fitness events to raise funds for our emergency relief fund

'Marj's Senior Challenge' - A loyal supporter Marj Phalen sent a letter out to PSI supporters, encouraging them to help our emergency relief

Rose-Anne Boucher led the Mercado in Pembroke!



We received grants from the Perry and Phyllis Schwartz Foundation, Joann Hartman Family Foundation and the Basilian Fathers Foundation to help sustain and develop our education and community programs

The Guatemala Friends Circle organized trivia nights & a holiday ornaments sale to help with our year-end fundraising efforts.

All our Friends Circles helped tremendously with our emergency relief campaign.





How to get involved

Make a donation

Partner with us giving monthly to our different programs:

Donations from USA:

www.plantingseedsinternational.org/en/donate-now
or send a check to Planting Seeds International, 2860
Weller Lane, Northbrook IL, 60062

Start or join a Friend Circle

Join an existing Friend Circle and be an active part organizing fundraisers and awareness events

Visiting Guatemala

Know our programs first hand joining our Annual Education Tour

Supporting a specific program

Early Childhood Education
Community Center
Family Nurturing
Girls Empowerment
Youth Leadership



www.plantingseedsinternational.org

Email mishel@plantingseedsinternational.org for more info