



# Guatemala Village Health

## Improving Lives One Village at a Time

Newsletter Issue 8, November 2020

### Our Mission

To improve individual and village health in rural Guatemala through education, empowerment of local leaders, and development of local health providers.

We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization based in Seattle, Washington.

### February Guatemala Trip Gayle DeBolt-Richins

One of the career highlights of my past 26 years as a nurse was the privilege of traveling with GVH in February 2020. As I attended the planning sessions, I wondered how we could possibly get to all of the villages in such a short amount of time. The planning was detailed and exciting, and in the process I learned a lot about the organization, its mission and Guatemalan culture.

When we finally arrived, I was taken aback by the warmth of the GVH team. Our team leader, Dr. Ann Dreyer, kept the village clinics running smoothly. Nutritional supplements are provided to children under the age of two, and with the assistance of GVH to prevent malnutrition. The conditions were rugged, but the medical care and education we provided were appreciated.

I loved my time in Guatemala and will always remember the people, culture, and beauty of the country. Without GVH, many would not have access to much needed medical care, health education, and nutritional supplementation. I hope to return to Guatemala soon.



2020 has been a year like no other - despite all that has happened, we continue working to meet the needs of the villages we work with and support the local public health system. Our goal to empower rural Mayan villagers in Guatemala to progress toward improved health for all remains unchanged. Despite a lockdown in late March in Guatemala, our in-country team has continued to send medicines and supplies. We truly appreciate all your support and encouragement as we all work together to get through the many challenges of our time. Thank you/Mil gracias from all of us at GVH.

### Remembering Steven Fain

It is with great sadness that we must announce that our dear beloved board member Steve Fain passed unexpectedly in his sleep on November 10th, 2020. Those who knew Steve would probably first describe his amazing positive attitude, enthusiasm, creativity, and friendliness.

Steve was a very valued board member and was loved by all. Steve actively supported GVH for about 8 years and was a board member for the 2 years preceding his passing. Steve brought forward many good ideas, including making our GVH website available in Spanish, which we look forward to launching in 2021.

GVH is establishing a [scholarship fund in Steve's name](#) and will be working with his family to determine the focus which will include leadership training for youth. Those wishing to donate in Steve's memory and help us continue our direct work and interaction in the villages may do so on our website. We are so grateful to Steve and the Fain family for their support over the years. Steve will be forever missed and celebrated by GVH.



Steve Fain salsa dancing with former Board Member Diana Orellana

### Dining & Dancing with GVH

On May 2nd, over 100 meals were prepared for and donated to GVH by [Antigua Guatemala Restaurant](#) in Kent, WA and delivered all over the Puget Sound area by GVH board members and volunteers. Gerard and Anne Morriveau donated wine for the evening. Once everyone received their meal, they joined us for a zoom gathering, including a greeting from Guatemalan Consul Claudia Gatica, a presentation about GVH programs by Jennifer Hooch and then a lively dance class taught by Maria Lindbergh. This event raised \$7,200. Great fun was had by all!

In June we held a two-part event to teach our community how to make tres leches cake, mojitos and Guatemalan tostadas, and raised another \$1,000. After receiving a special donation of mint leaves from Orcas Island, Board President Debbie, Carolyn and Jennifer packed up kits for each recipe. Over Zoom, we learned how to make delicious tres leches from Board VP Mickey, perfect mojitos with board member Marcelo and created delicious chimichurri and black bean dip with Vladimir, who joined all the way from Guatemala. We then interviewed Vladimir about permaculture and our work training youth. This smaller event made for an intimate connection among GVH staff and friends.

# Program Highlights



## Healthy Moms

Thankfully we have been able to continue providing micronutrient supplements/prenatal vitamins to all women who are pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to get pregnant due to the generous support of Vitamin Angels. We just resumed every 6 weeks visits to the villages, supporting prenatal care. Even fewer women are venturing down to the health center in El Estor to give birth for fear of getting COVID, but we are still providing clean delivery kits to help lay mid-wives provide safe deliveries.



## Healthy Babies

Through hard work on the part of our in country team, we have been able to continue our nutritional supplement program for babies in the first 1000 days shipping supplies by bus and delivering to our villages by motorcycle during the lockdown.

## COVID-19 Response

When the outbreak began, we were able to send gloves, masks, gowns, soap and acetaminophen to our health promoters so they could remain safe and attend to patients. We created educational materials about COVID-19, and sent masks to every household to encourage people to go out with protection one at a time. In August we were able to gather enough supplies – medical and protective – to pack a full 40 ft container to send to Guatemala (see Container article for more details). Currently we are working with the Ministry of Health and the Health Center in El Estor to assure equitable and appropriate distribution. The great news is that there is now a new hospital in Morales that is much more accessible for the people of Izabal, and we hope to be able to send a container of equipment and supplies with the Mill Creek Rotary Club early next year to help outfit it.

## Healthy Houses

Our ongoing push to improve health for our villagers through filtered water and sanitation by way of composting toilets remains a cornerstone of our work. Just before COVID, we finished installing composting toilets with handwashing stations in all the schools. Currently we are in the process of applying for another Rotary grant to provide Baños Aboneros and Ecofiltros to another 200 families, resulting in half of our village households living healthier. Having completed a successful pilot, we are moving forward with smokeless stoves installations. You can help a family get a smokeless stove and decrease asthma for children and risk of emphysema, especially for women, by donating on our website.



## Santiago Training & Development Center & Permaculture Program



Although we were not able to host our first training course in permaculture due to COVID, our staff did plant the entire Santiago property with great harvest which they shared locally with experiencing food shortage as a result of the lockdowns. Sadly, this month our villagers lost their traditional corn and bean crops to tropical storm Eta. We plan to help them address food shortages with support for home “kitchen gardens” and planting of food producing trees and bushes. We are preparing teaching programs in food preparation from permaculture crops.

## Healthy Schools

Unfortunately schools in Guatemala were shut down in March and remain closed. We were able to distribute toothbrushes, toothpaste and fluoride during the February trip, and plan to resume this very successful program along with parasite treatment when schools reopen.

## Chronic Disease Management

We have also maintained medication delivery for our patients with diabetes, asthma and high blood pressure though we are now out of medications and looking for how to meet this need in the new year.

## Medical Team Trip

In retrospect it is amazing that we were able to get in one of our usual 2 medical team trips to Guatemala. In February COVID was still an evolving concept. We had an amazing team that included resident and attending doctors from Kaiser and Valley Family Medicine training programs, returning providers, and first timers from across the Northwest. We served 10 villages in 8 clinic days, provided health screenings and preventive treatment to all new students at Ak'Tenamit (the Mayan boarding school near Rio Dulce) and collaborated with the Ministry of Health to conduct 2 trainings for comadronas/lay midwives and health promoters. To combat the scabies epidemic (a growing worldwide problem) we piloted several forms of treatment/prevention. We are hoping to travel again in spring 2021. Let us know if you are interested!



Board member Marcelo got his miles in by climbing mountains in Montana

## Race to Guatemala 2020

In July, GVH embarked on an entirely new fundraising adventure with #racetoguategvh. The GVH community brought to life the ambitious and exciting idea of a virtual race from Seattle to El Estor, Guatemala to raise funds in support of six integral GVH programs viewed as critical for the health of villagers. Board members and volunteers quickly pitched in to plan the race and build teams and enthusiasm on social media, resulting in us reaching our goal of raising \$10,000!

From US independence day (7/4) to the Guatemalan independence day (9/15), 23 sponsors supported 86 racers across six teams as they virtually raced to Guatemala. Teams were composed of local and geographically separated friends, families and coworkers aged 9 to 83 years young from various cities and states. Racers cheered each other on as they cycled, ran, walked, hiked, climbed mountains, swam, worked out and did yoga to complete each team's goal of traveling 3,700 miles from Seattle to El Estor. In the end, the teams greatly surpassed their distance goals by collectively traveling an impressive 30,000+ miles!

\*The \$10,000 raised by the six team will be allocated provided that GVH has sufficient operational funds

Team Baby: \$1,587 provides nutritional supplements for one year for 22 of the 207 of the babies enrolled in the first 1000 days of life

Team Medicine: \$2,721 helps cover the costs of medication for chronic diseases (diabetes, hypertension, asthma), lab supplies (glucose testing strips, etc), follow-up care (ultrasounds, x-rays, transport to health specialist), and COVID-19 medication + supplies (Tylenol, masks) for next year

Team Toilet: \$2,205 will provide 14 composting toilets

Team Stove: \$2,586 will provide 19 smokeless stoves

Team Grow: \$464 will allow 3-4 families to receive perma-culture training, equipment, and seeds for a family kitchen gardens

Team Women: \$501 will maintain 15 women on DepoProvera for a year and \$300 would be used



We are so excited to feature Lena Hightower, RN as our Volunteer of the Year for 2020. Lena has been a part of GVH since we started - first as a nurse traveling with the medical teams, and then working in the surplus supplies warehouse at Kaiser. This year, in the midst of COVID, she took on the packing and organizing of the container we sent to Guatemala in August. We love Lena's straight-to-the-point communication style and her can-do attitude, especially as we navigated the pandemic's many challenges.

On past Guatemala trips, she brought her experience and knowledge of primary care, triaging the many patients who came to the clinic each day. Often she knew just what they needed and could assess and treat without having to send them on to other healthcare providers. Lena also inspired GVH to implement group health education visits. Even now, she continues to help plan for a 2021 container shipment that will help outfit a new public hospital in Morales. Lena's energy and fortitude are an inspiration to many of us!

Lena helped us pack and organize 15,000 lbs of essential medical supplies for the container we sent in August

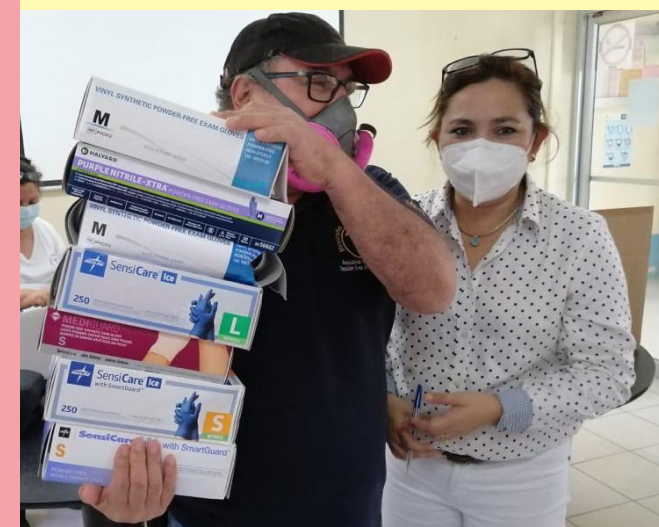
## We Sent a Container

Thanks to the generosity of volunteers, Providence International, Kaiser, and the Rotarians from Mill Creek, Fidalgo Island and Guatemala Este clubs, we success fully sent 15,000 lbs of essential medical supplies to Guatemala in a 40ft shipping container! Our fantastic team of volunteers in Seattle gathered, organized, and packed donated medical supplies onto pallets and into the container, we shipped the container off August 22 to arrive on September 28th.

After clearing customs, it was delivered to Samuel's (our in-country director) home at 3am! Despite the container's untimely delivery, 18 incredible Guatemalan volunteers rallied to unload and transfer the supplies into the house by hand for the next 12+ hours. Since arrival, the medical supplies have been distributed to 2 national hospitals, a public ophthalmology hospital, 4 maternal and child health centers and a few other health clinics throughout the country.

The bulk of the supplies are being delivered to the Izabal region which serves the villagers GVH works with. Samuel says, "It's so special that the medical communities in the US and Guatemala are united by contributing to the well-being of Guatemalans. God bless you all for this support." We are so grateful for all those involved in getting these essential medical supplies to Guatemala and distributing them to those who need them most!

Dr. Vivian Cordon, Minister of Health for Izabal, distributing supplies received from GVH



## Volunteer of the Year



## New GVH Team Member

We welcomed Eli Hwang as the new GVH program assistant in September, making her the newest team member. Born and raised in Paraguay, her love for Latin America and helping others led to her excitedly jumping at the opportunity of contributing to GVH's mission. With her education and professional experience in journalism, communication and marketing she has been helping us keep our community updated on what GVH has been up to via email, social media and this newsletter. She has served as a volunteer in educational and nutritional programs in various countries, and hopes to do the same in Guatemala with GVH as soon as possible.

## Aldea Chinachabilchoch Medical Clinic

"It has been an honor to be a part of the construction of the new building from which medical care will be provided to approximately 5,000 people who currently have neither an adequate nor deserving space. Unfortunately, due to all that has occurred this year we were not able to complete the clinic's construction but we hope to resume construction in early 2021 so that we can bring this wonderful project to life."

- Vladimir Melgar,  
Project Manager



## Give by Shopping

We're always exploring different ways of giving to GVH, so this year we teamed up with [Boon Supply](https://boonsupply.com). You can shop their site for great gift and home items and 40% of your cart total goes to GVH! Our favorite items are the reversible wrapping paper and the entire waste-free line, which includes reusable zip pouches and laundry strips. Shop [boonsupply.com](https://boonsupply.com) now til December 31st to give to GVH and your loved ones!

**How it works:** When you're ready to check out, click **Check Out** > go to **Find a Fundraiser** > search for **Guatemala Village Health** > click **Check Out** again > complete your order and payment > and now you've given to GVH!

Another way to make a difference year-round while you shop is through [AmazonSmile](https://smile.amazon.com). When you shop on Amazon, 0.5% of your eligible purchases' price will be donated to GVH! Simply shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and select Guatemala Village Health if shopping through a web browser OR shop with AmazonSmile turned ON in the Amazon Shopping app.

## GVH Staff in Guatemala

In-Country Director: Samuel Alvarez  
Medical Director: Alejandra Zarazúa  
Project Manager: Vladimir Melgar  
Village Nurse Coordinator: Lesbia Xi  
Village Project Manager: Julio Choc Xo  
Permaculture Instructor: Anibal Coc Chub  
Pharmacy Manager: Santiago Melgar

Executive Director: Carolyn Bain  
Program Assistant: Eli Hwang  
Director of Programs: Jennifer Hook

## Board of Directors

President: Deborah Hopkins  
Vice President: Mickey Kander  
Secretary: Stefany Sterling  
Treasurer: Sam McCracken

Julia Bonilla  
Steven Fain (2018-2020)  
Joe Kyle  
Gabriela Maki  
Marcelo Suarez  
Peggy Visser  
Teresa Wallace

## How You Can Help

You can join us and support this vital work in Guatemala by volunteering, recruiting others, finding resources, and donating money and resources.

Visit our website at [www.gvhealth.org](https://www.gvhealth.org) to learn more about what we do and to find out more about our rewarding and exciting volunteer opportunities.

Donations by cash or check are welcome or [donate online](https://www.gvhealth.org/donate) at our website.

Website: [www.gvhealth.org](https://www.gvhealth.org)  
Facebook: [@guatemalavillagehealth](https://www.facebook.com/guatemalavillagehealth)  
Instagram: [@guatemalavillagehealth](https://www.instagram.com/guatemalavillagehealth)  
Twitter: [@gvillagehealth](https://twitter.com/gvillagehealth)

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