



# FALL 2017

## NEWSLETTER

AMIGOS DE SANTA CRUZ FOUNDATION

COMMITTED TO HELPING IMPROVE THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE OF SANTA CRUZ THROUGH SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT



Dear Friends,



*It is an honor to write to you in my first year as Executive Director of Amigos. During this year of change, I am encouraged by exciting new initiatives taking shape and inspired by our team of talented local staff that are leading the way.*

*As we look forward to celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year, it is my priority to keep **education, economic empowerment, cultivating local leadership, and investment in generational change** the heart of everything we do.*

*Together with our staff, our community, and our supporters, I am confident that we have the passion and the vision to continue to work toward a brighter future for the next generation. A future in which everyone enjoys **access to quality public education, in which a girl's education is valued as much as any boys, and a future in which the local economy offers opportunities for both men and women to provide a good income for themselves and their families.***

*While much work remains to be done, there is so much positive change that has been accomplished. I hope you will join me in celebrating these accomplishments, and that you will continue to support us as we move forward.*

Jessie Cohn  
Executive Director



## Investing in the Local Economy of Santa Cruz

*"This is a huge opportunity for me. I now have a stable income each month and I'm helping my family to move forward." – Petrona Martín Balcot, 2016 Culinary Program Graduate*

Fostering greater access to economic opportunities is central to everything Amigos does. Our CECAP vocational programs focus on teaching new trades and business skills that empower entrepreneurs and promote local business development. Through targeted education and skill building programs, we are seeing real change in the economy

of Santa Cruz. Amigos also offers work opportunities through our training programs. We are proud to provide work to over 100 artisans, and to celebrate with recent Youth Corps intern graduates who are now fully employed in their area of study. This year we are supporting women-owned small businesses in mushroom cultivation and cooking.

Amigos works to promote economic empowerment that respects the dignity of each man and woman by improving their ability to earn a good income for themselves and their families, not just depend on handouts. Economic empowerment leads to healthier families and more educated youth, improving the wellbeing of the entire community.

## Higher Education is on the rise!

When Amigos was founded in 1998, only 6 students graduated from primary school in Santa Cruz, and few yet dreamed of high school. Our secondary scholarship program started in 2002, with support for 6 students to go on to high school for the first time. We have now seen over 90 of our scholarship recipients graduate from high school, and Amigos' own Co-Director of CECAP, Estela Simaj, became the first woman to graduate from university last year! This year, we are proud to

support 29 high school and 10 university scholarship students – our largest cohort yet. Higher education is now a possibility for Santa Cruz youth. Those first few students paved the way for the next generation, and interest in scholarships grows with each passing year. Both boys and girls now have the opportunity to pursue their studies and choose a professional career path. Education remains at the heart of Amigos' work, and it is the key to alleviating poverty for the people of Santa Cruz.



*Meet Manuel, son of Maria, a single mom. He was the first in his family to complete primary and then secondary school. A graduate of our first Youth Corps group, he is now employed full-time as an accountant.*

# Healthy Homes for Our Artisans

Over 100 women are now earning an income through Amigos-supported businesses initiatives. This year, we combined economic opportunities with support for healthier homes to help these women sustain a better life for themselves and their families. We work with all of our artisans to ensure that their homes are equipped with quality water filters so that they and their families enjoy a healthy living environment. We monitor and provide assistance to mothers whose children suffer from malnutrition, to ensure that they receive treatment and education. And we conduct nutritional recipe trainings, encouraging healthy eating and family gardens so that young children receive the nutrition they need to learn and grow.



*Artisans learn to make 'green tortillas' with super nutritious chaya, thanks to Miracles in Action's Healthy Families funding.*

This holistic approach combines economic empowerment with overall health and wellbeing. It allows us to target support to our

artisans where it is needed. And it is providing the knowledge, skills and opportunities they need to attain a better life.

## BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT

Mushroom Cultivation in Jaibalito

**What:** Women's Mushroom Cultivation Business

**Who:** Group of 8 women, 20-40 years old

**Where:** Jaibalito, a smaller village just west of Santa Cruz

**Why:** To take advantage of high demand and low supply of mushrooms in the area. Mushroom production requires relatively low investment cost and quick harvests, providing for a short turnaround period for income generation.

**How:** Amigos worked with the local women to identify the business opportunity, learn how to cultivate mushrooms and establish a production center, and provide ongoing technical assistance to support the business with production and commercialization.

# Encouraging a Love for Reading

Meet Manuela – Early Education Specialist



*Manuela Simón Pérez*

Our early education model classroom program is aimed at improving the quality of public education in Santa Cruz. It is now in its 5<sup>th</sup> year and reaches over 135 children in preschool through 2nd grade. This year we expanded the program to include an extra afternoon reading session and lending library – the only active lending library in

Santa Cruz. Many parents in our village still do not themselves read and write, and books are rarely found in the home. The reading program aims to introduce young children to a love for reading that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.

Manuela Simón Pérez coordinates this program. Here she tells us why she thinks it is making a difference.

**Why do you think this program is needed?**

*Children need an opportunity to read and think creatively. Public school classrooms here in Guatemala are very structured, and this program provides an opportunity for students to enjoy reading, to think critically, and to express their opinions. This will help them grow to be stronger and more successful adults.*

**Are you seeing a difference?**

*It was difficult to get the children to attend at first, but now they even arrive early! Their reading ability is clearly improving, but also their enthusiasm and participation which is just as important.*

**How would you like to see this program grow in the future?**

*Right now we are only able to work with a limited number of students. I would like to have all children in Santa Cruz participate and develop a love for reading. I would also like to see the parents themselves become more involved.*

Thanks to generous support from the **John Brown Family Foundation** and **Innocent Eyes Project**, our early education programs will continue to work with these young learners through the end of their primary school studies.



*"I never learned to read or write myself. Now I am proud to see my son so excited about reading, and taking books home to read to his sister!"*

– Margarita Ramos, mother of Edgar

## Putting Santa Cruz to Work

*CECAP's business initiatives are taking off, providing more work for the community and a sustainable source of income to help support Amigos' programs.*

Manos Cruceñas artisan store and Café Sabor Cruceño are two social enterprise businesses run by Amigos. They provide work to CECAP graduates, and income from their sales is helping us to meet our goal of sustainability for CECAP. They currently employ over 80 artisans and culinary graduates from the community.



*CECAP artisan products are now available for sale on-line.*

### Culinary Graduate Teaches Guatemalan Cooking

Guatemalan cooking classes, offered by staff from our graduate-run Café Sabor Cruceño, are taking off! Participants learn to make traditional Guatemalan dishes with indigenous head chef, Claudia Cumes. Claudia offers hands-on cooking demonstrations and explains the role that these dishes play in the culture and community of Santa Cruz, followed by a delicious lunch on our rooftop patio.



*Claudia teaches local cooking classes at CECAP in both Spanish and English.*

### Artisan Store now available ONLINE

The beautiful handmade products available for purchase in our store, Manos Cruceñas, are now available online! That means you can shop and make orders from

home, adding a convenience to our customers and more work for our artisans. Visit our website today to see the selection of unique scarves, bags and accessories. [store.amigosdesantacruz.org](http://store.amigosdesantacruz.org)

## Expanding Sexual and Reproductive Health Education for All

*"I realize now that we as educators need to be a part of this change."*

– Pablo Silvestre, Middle School Teacher

Amigos has provided sexual and reproductive health education (SRH) in all public schools in Santa Cruz since 2014, reaching over 1,000 students. Early marriage and teen pregnancy can greatly impede a young person's access to an education and freedom to choose their own future. We provide the youth of Santa Cruz with the information and resources needed to help them avoid unplanned pregnancies, empower them to make healthy and responsible decisions about



their bodies and their lives, and consider marriage as more mature adults. An important part of this program is training and preparing public school teachers to integrate these important topics into their regular curriculum. Previously, few public school teachers covered sexual and reproductive health due to cultural taboos and their own lack of knowledge. Now,

with the training and resources provided by Amigos, they are increasingly starting to see the benefits of more educated and aware youth, and willingly teach the classes themselves. Investment in teacher training ensures a long-term and sustainable change in access to SRH education for all Santa Cruz youth.

Amigos bids farewell to Pat Torpie, Founder and Executive Director of 19 years, and completes its first leadership transition to new Executive Director, Jessie Cohn.

Amigos hires new Program Director, Alex Macfarlan, and promotes longtime local staff member, Rosalia Simón Pérez, to Associate Program Director.

10 interns from our first Youth Corps class of 2016 gain permanent employment.

Model Classroom Program expands to include 135 children in preschool through 2nd grade, including an afternoon reading program and lending library.

Women's Empowerment Program focuses on supporting new business initiatives including mushroom cultivation and cooking entrepreneurship.

11 scholarship students graduate from high school and our first scholarship student completes her university degree.

485 students participate in ongoing sexual health education classes in the public schools.

383 participate in CECAP classes in first half of 2017, an increase of 10% from last year.

Amigos social enterprise café and store sales increase 70% and 40%, respectively, in the first half of 2017.

*We need your support to keep our programs going. Your donation will go a long way in our hands!*

### USE OF FUNDS IN 2016



3.5% Fundraising  
7% Administration  
89.5% Program

## Honoring Our Donors

*Amigos programs are generously supported by:*

Carson Foundation  
CG Charitable Foundation  
SG Foundation  
The Summit Foundation  
The Seattle Foundation  
Miracles In Action  
John Brown Family Foundation  
Innocent Eyes Project  
Mayan Educational Foundation  
Boulware Foundation

*....and our many wonderful friends...*



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# Building Indigenous Leadership Within Amigos



*Amigos is proud of our local staff! Of our 22 staff and 12 interns, all but two are indigenous youth leaders from Santa Cruz and surrounding towns.*

Empowering local staff is what Amigos is all about. We are proud to be an organization run by indigenous local staff, and it is those staff that are increasingly taking greater leadership roles in the organization. They are the first generation to pursue an education in Santa Cruz, and many were scholarship recipients of Amigos. Our team of 22 staff and 12 interns are dedicated to being part of the change that they want to see in

their community. They are gaining knowledge and experience as young professionals, and learning the skills to ensure high quality work in everything that we do. By employing young adults from the community, we are working toward a generational change in Santa Cruz. Our local staff are not just managing programs, but taking part in the leadership of the organization and making key decisions on the strategy and future direction of our work.



*Rosalía Simón Pérez,  
Associate Program Director*

We are excited to announce Rosalia's promotion to the Amigos leadership team this year! Rosalia has worked for Amigos for 7 years, and is currently completing her law degree. She is now managing programs, leading staff, and providing strategic guidance for the direction of the organization - an example of how Amigos seeks to foster local leadership in all that we do.

*"I want to show the world what we are accomplishing here. I am proud to be a leader for change in my community."*

## Thank you for your support!

On behalf of the families of Santa Cruz la Laguna, we thank you for your generous support! None of what we have accomplished over the last 19 years would have been possible without each one of you. Together, we have seen how access to better education and economic opportunities can change a generation. And together we will continue to work toward a brighter future for the next generation to come. Our work

is having a real impact, but there is much left to do. We hope that you will give generously this year to ensure that we can continue to make a difference for the people of Santa Cruz.



1998-2018