



## MAY UPDATE

# Meet the Rising Stars of Santa Cruz!



This month we shine the spotlight on our **2019 Santa Cruz Youth Corps!** Now in its 4th full year, this year-long professional development program provides work experience and leadership training to recent high school graduates. The experience gained through the program will put them on the first step toward a professional career, as well as empower them to become responsible agents for positive change in their community. We are so very proud of each one of them! Here are a few of their stories.

### **María Asunción Álvarez Martín – Intern at COINDI Association**

Maria was intimidated when she started working at COINDI, a local women's empowerment organization. Maria is a bit shy, and this first professional experience took her out of her comfort zone. But she is now enjoying the learning process and becoming accustomed to her work and colleagues. Maria works as a secretary and accountant for COINDI while also learning about their microcredit program for rural women. Her dream is to one day own her own business, and to thank her family who supported her education.



*"This job was so hard for me at first, but little by little I have become more comfortable in*

## **Arsenio Miqueas Santos Pérez – Intern at Audio Track Emanuel Estudio**



Arsenio is one of a number of budding musical talents in Santa Cruz! He is gaining fame for his singer-songwriter concerts in the village, and is now taking that talent to his work this year in a local film studio. As one of 10 siblings, Arsenio learned the love of music from his family at an early age and can now play the piano, trumpet and guitar. He was also the 3rd in his family to graduate from High School, showing his family's significant investment in education. He hopes to one day open his own film studio for youth in Santa Cruz.

*"I want to keep learning and doing new things in my life. I want to become a great musician."*

## **Lucia Simaj Martin – Intern with Mayan Traditions Foundation**

From the small, remote Santa Cruz community of Tzanzomel, Lucia was the first from her village to graduate High School. She had to work hard and many people doubted she would make it through to graduation, but one particular Middle School teacher saw her potential and motivated her to continue. She now understands that her achievements can serve as an important inspiration for other young people from her town, particularly girls, and she is motivated to continue.

This year, not only is Lucia interning with Mayan Traditions, an organization that works with Mayan artisans from neighboring towns, but she is also pursuing her university degree!

*"I know that I have to be an example, I have to continue working hard and moving forward so that the others who come after me can also achieve their dreams."*



## **Community Projects to Protect Our Environment**

One of the requirements of the Santa Cruz Youth Corps, as with all Amigos' youth leadership and scholarship programs, is completion of a community service project.



These projects instill youth participants with an understanding that their academic and professional achievements are not personal achievements alone, but also preparation to become strong leaders in their community.

This year those projects are centered on improving the local environment. One group is trying to tackle the problem of clandestine trash dumps along the mountainsides in the pueblo where people illegally dump household trash that litters the beautiful scenery and then washes down and pollutes the lake below. The youth are leading a trash cleanup, and then working with municipality officials to monitor those locations for the rest of the year to ensure that no one else dumps trash there and, if they do, fines are imposed. Their plan is meant to ensure not just that the trash is cleaned up today, but to influence a change in habits that encourages people to properly dispose of their trash in the future.

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