



# NEWSLETTER 2020-2021

Improving the lives of the people of Santa Cruz through support for education and sustainable economic empowerment since 1998



Dear Friends,

*In a year that has turned our lives upside down, the communities of Santa Cruz faced a bleak reality. Yet*

*I am proud that in the face of crisis, the Amigos team stepped up. With regular programs suspended, our local staff quickly shifted to implementing emergency initiatives with a threefold response: ensuring all families have food on their table, creating jobs to ease unemployment, and supporting health centers with supplies and public education campaigns to prevent the spread of COVID.*

*Most importantly, amid a lack of official local leadership, Amigos staff stepped in. They organized community meetings and provided support to local government, demonstrating the high standing of Amigos as an institution of leadership in the local community.*

*I am particularly inspired by the creative ways that the Amigos team continues work towards our core mission of education and economic empowerment, despite the restrictions of this pandemic. Classes are cancelled, yet our team is going door to door to deliver books and engage children's critical thinking skills. Sexual and Reproductive Health trainings moved online, providing youth with a safe space to ask questions and seek support. Despite the temporary closure of our retail store, artisans continue to be employed making masks and filling wholesale orders.*

*We are a local organization with the knowledge and flexibility to respond quickly to the changing local needs of our community, particularly during crisis. Our efforts this year demonstrate that Amigos is stronger than ever, and I hope that you will continue to support our work.*

Jessie Cohn,  
Executive Director

## SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY IN CRISIS



## INNOVATING EDUCATION PROGRAMS DURING COVID

Unable to hold our Afterschool Reading Program, Amigos staff put their walking shoes on and began going door-to-door each week to deliver books and read with children. Local schools here in Guatemala failed students during the COVID-19 shutdown, few public school teachers stayed engaged with their students and few parents have the resources to enable virtual learning. With no books or resources at home, this long period out of school puts Santa Cruz children, particularly girls, at a much higher risk for dropout. These home visits by Amigos staff are now an important village ritual, providing motivation for the children, who eagerly await their designated time to receive books for the next week.

Our staff keep active WhatsApp groups where children can engage with their peers about what they read, sharing videos with their proud mothers grinning in the background. Though many parents are themselves illiterate, participation in at-home reading with their children is taking off as a result of these efforts. This is a true turning point for education in Santa Cruz and a positive result to come out of the lockdown! Being deeply embedded in the local community makes us uniquely positioned to ensure academic engagement is not completely lost during this time. Our efforts currently reach 96 students in kinder through 5th grade.

## ARTISAN-MADE FACEMASKS & COVID EDUCATION

Despite the closure of our retail store due to COVID-19, CECAP-trained artisans set to work making facemasks that are donated to the local community. The work ensures an ongoing income for artisans and has allowed for the donation of two masks for every single person in Santa Cruz! In addition to facemasks, Amigos has also donated other personal protective equipment and medical supplies to the extremely understaffed and under equipped local health clinics. We continue to educate the community via home visits, posters, and videos about the importance of COVID prevention.





# ACTION DURING CRISIS

## JOBS STIMULUS PROGRAM KEEPS THE ECONOMY AFLOAT



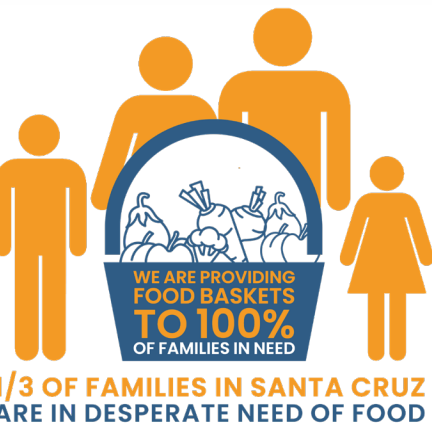
When Guatemala quickly shut down in mid-March due to COVID-19, the economic impacts here in Santa Cruz hit hard and fast. As an economy reliant on tourism, unemployment topped 50% by the end of the summer. In response, Amigos quickly moved to providing emergency food deliveries to those most in need, and implementing a Jobs Stimulus Program that put people back to work. The socially-distanced jobs are created to support projects that benefit the local community, such as making a school wheelchair accessible, community mural and mosaic projects,

and local infrastructure improvements. These local fishermen all lost their ability to earn a living by traveling to other towns to sell fish due to COVID travel restrictions. Amigos employed them to plant *tul*, a water-based grass-like plant that helps to filter harmful pollutants and protect the ecosystem of the lake. They were glad to be back on the water, earning an income to support their families while helping improve the health of Lake Atitlán. To date, over 370 people received work through our Jobs Stimulus Program.

### GREEN JOBS IN SANTA CRUZ

We recognize the significant threat that environmental degradation poses to educational and economic advances in Santa Cruz. While some efforts had to be put on hold due to COVID-19, several of the projects supported under our Jobs Stimulus Program were specifically designed to address pressing environmental needs. The *tul* planting program, pictured above, is one example. We also supported reforestation to prevent erosion and protect community drinking water and organized trash cleanups around the municipality.

## OUR IMPACT DURING COVID



# INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

## WOMEN PIONEERS ARE GOING TO UNIVERSITY!

This year we are proud to support 16 university students from Santa Cruz with educational scholarships, a record number in the 18-year history of our scholarship program, and 80% of those students are women! Despite the difficulties imposed by COVID-19 restrictions this year, they continued their studies. This achievement is significant in a community where girls' education is valued far second to boys, early marriage and pregnancy are still all too common, and few women work outside of the home. These young women are paving the way toward a different future for the girls of Santa Cruz, one in which they can aim far and dream big, growing up with more confidence and amplifying their voice in the local community.



### MEET ROSITA: SUCCESSFUL FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR

*“My ex-husband did not allow me to participate in activities outside of the home. Being a part of this business now has made me feel more free and happy, and the income helps me to support my children.”*



Rosalia ‘Rosita’ Solis Vasquez is part of a 5-woman cooperative that runs an oyster mushroom business. She recently separated from her husband and this is her first time working outside of the home. Rosita is grateful for the opportunity to earn an in-

come to support her five children now that she is a single mother. She is now the star sales agent of the team, maintaining high sales even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Rosita especially likes the opportunity to interact and collaborate with other women, an opportunity she did not have before. Hers is one of four mushroom businesses that Amigos has supported, benefiting 20 women to earn a living as mushroom demand remains very high.

### OUR WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

- The program currently supports over 50 women entrepreneurs and 18 businesses.
- 100% of participants have never had formal work outside of the home
  - 90% are single mothers with no other source of income
  - 88% never made it past the 2nd grade

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR COMMUNITY TOURISM

Amigos is currently in the early stages of a new project to support the growth of community tourism in Santa Cruz! Over the next three years, we will be investing in projects that promote a unique approach to tourism growth, one that focuses on promoting Santa Cruz’s beautiful natural environment and local culture in a way that is environmentally friendly and directly

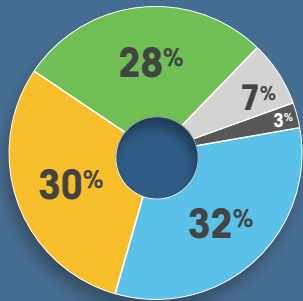
supports the local community. Projects will include improving hiking trails, training guides, and helping local families to set up homestays, among other things. The Santa Cruz to Jaibalito hiking trail has already been completed, as one concrete achievement. Stay tuned to this space next year for more exciting updates!



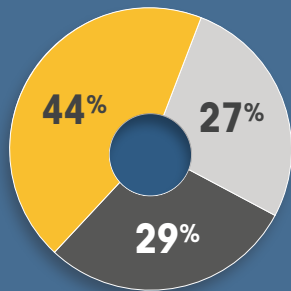


## USE OF FUNDS 2019

TRANSFORMING GENEROUS  
PARTNER SUPPORT INTO  
REAL IMPACT



### USE OF OPERATING FUNDS



### OPERATING REVENUE



## HONORING OUR DONORS

*Amigos programs are generously supported by:*

Carson Foundation  
SG Foundation  
The Summit Foundation  
Friends of Amigos  
Amigos de Jaibalito  
SST Foundation  
Grousemont Foundation  
Beyond Our Borders  
John Brown Family Foundation  
Miracles In Action  
Maya Educational Foundation  
Chances for Children International  
and our many wonderful friends...

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR  
GENEROUS SUPPORT!**

## JOIN US...

*in changing the world,  
one community at a time...  
one generation at a time.*

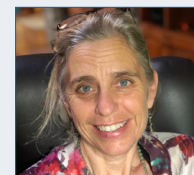


We are proud to be an organization led by indigenous local staff, almost all from the Santa Cruz communities themselves. The young men and women who now make up our team were among the first recipients of school aid when Amigos first began working

22 years ago. Today, they are leaders of the organization. We are helping to build the first wave of young professionals in Santa Cruz, young men and women who are the leaders of change.

*"I am proud of Amigos' strong standing within the community. We are looked to for advice and leadership on many levels"*

– Deedle Ratcliffe, President - Board of Directors



## SUPPORT OUR WORK TODAY!



We hope that you will give generously this year to help us break the cycle of poverty in Santa Cruz.

### DONATE ONLINE

[www.amigosdesantacruz.org/donate](http://www.amigosdesantacruz.org/donate)

### SEND A CHECK

Amigos de Santa Cruz Foundation  
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Seattle, WA 98102

For more information and to sign up for monthly e-newsletters, visit:  
**[www.amigosdesantacruz.org](http://www.amigosdesantacruz.org)**

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