



NEWSLETTER 2023-2024

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

*Celebrating **25** Years of Impact!*

25 YEARS OF BUILDING LOCAL LEADERSHIP

Dear Friends,

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary of working to break the cycle of poverty in Santa Cruz la Laguna, I am both humbled and grateful for what we have accomplished together. Here in our little corner of the world, with your support, we are making a difference. Young men and women in Santa Cruz are growing up with greater access to education and economic opportunities. They are working toward a better future than their parent's generation could have imagined. These are their stories of accomplishment and inspiration, which I am proud to share with you in this year's newsletter.



While we celebrate these accomplishments, we also recognize that the remaining challenges are great. Too many in our community still struggle to escape the clutches of generational poverty. The community is ready for a change but constrained by a dysfunctional public education system that is failing local families. Children still graduate without the basic skills and critical thinking that they need to improve their lives and their community's future.

Amigos staff and board have identified access to true quality education as the key to moving toward a stronger, healthier, and more resilient Santa Cruz, where families can live and thrive. Stay tuned here in the coming months as we announce new initiatives that will address this gap in exciting and strategic ways.

I hope you will continue to support us in this endeavor, to make our world a better place – one community at a time, one generation at a time. We could not do it without you.

Jessie Cohn, Executive Director



Santiago, Estela, Manuela, Paulina, Cristina, Rosalia, and Daniel all grew up participating in Amigos programs. They were young children when Amigos was founded, and their early educational years benefited from Amigos' extra support in the school. Later on, they each became the first in their family and community to continue their studies – technical, high school, university, and even masters' programs, with Amigos' support. **And today, they are the directors and managers leading Amigos' work in their own community!**

All seven young men and women in this photo represent Amigos' long-term commitment in the community and investment in local leadership. Their leadership today determines the strategic direction of our work in the Santa Cruz communities. As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we are also celebrating the accomplishments of these incredible young adults and the hope that they represent in their community.

CREATING A VIBRANT COMMUNITY THROUGH ART & LOCAL TOURISM

Walking through the streets of Santa Cruz, tourists and residents alike can now experience the breathtaking views as well as see houses freshly painted in bright colors and artistic murals celebrating local Santa Cruz culture.

This Amigos-sponsored project called Orgullo Cruceño, or Santa Cruz Pride, seeks to beautify the village as well as attract sustainable tourism to the community and generate income for local businesses. Designed in conjunction with community leaders and neighbors, the murals portray Santa Cruz's Mayan Kak'chikel heritage that is still alive today.



BUILDING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

TRAINING TOMORROW'S SOLAR INSTALLERS

In an area with plentiful sunshine, high electricity costs, and frequent power outages, demand for solar installation is booming as is the need for trained solar installers. Amigos' vocational training center, CECAP, launched a new training program this year to help meet that demand while introducing community members to a new and lucrative economic opportunity.

The yearlong Solar Installation Course utilizes a combination of online learning and in-person practical training to prepare local students to work on solar installation projects. Seven students will soon graduate from the first class, after completing on-site training with Amigos' private sector partners. We are excited about this opportunity to connect local students with new opportunities in the labor market and plan to provide more solar installation courses in the future.

DID YOU KNOW?

The CECAP training center and Amigos office is now 95% powered by solar energy.

LOCAL WOMEN BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE & BUSINESS SKILLS

Over the past 5 years, Amigos has supported 139 women to open 26 small businesses in the Santa Cruz communities. These entrepreneurs have had very limited formal schooling, are largely illiterate, and are often single mothers. The extra income they earn goes directly to supporting the well-being of their family, improving health outcomes, and keeping their children in school longer.

Through participation in this program, women also receive a series of workshops on personal empowerment including gender equality, community leadership, domestic violence, reproductive health, hygiene, and nutrition. They are building self-confidence and learning to raise their voice, both in the home and in their community.



Mushroom Cultivation Business



Organic Egg Farm

THE IMPACT ON A WOMAN'S LIFE



Increased Household Income



Better Health and Nutrition



Prioritize their Children's Education



Active Participants in their Families and Community



Empowered Decision Making

1

2

3

4

5

EDUCATING A NEW GENERATION

MOMS ADVOCATE FOR BETTER EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN

Rosa's parents never learned to read or write, and she was only able to study through the sixth grade, yet she wants a different future for her daughter Melissa. Rosa is a talented backstrap loom weaver and an active member of her community, yet nowadays she also finds time for something previously unheard of in Santa Cruz, advocating for her children's education.

Motivated by this desire for better education, Rosa volunteered on her public school's Parental School Board from 2021 to 2023. She found herself frustrated by the difficulties she faced in trying to implement positive changes in the public school and decided to register Melissa in Amigos' Afternoon Reading Program. As time went by, Rosa saw the positive difference this program made in Melissa's academic progress, but she also realized that her active involvement was essential to Melissa's success. Even though it does not come naturally for her, given her limited schooling, Rosa now makes a point of reading at home with Melissa. In addition to creating a habit and generating a closer bond between mother and daughter, Rosa is motivating her daughter to continue studying, to reach her goals, and to go further than her parents have gone.



ENGAGING MEN & BOYS IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Talking about sexual and reproductive health is still a taboo topic in indigenous communities in Guatemala, especially for boys and men. 'Machismo' culture dictates that men not engage in these topics, while also working to perpetuate deeply-rooted gender inequality. Fortunately, these ways of thinking are changing thanks to the workshops on comprehensive education, sexuality, and gender equality that Amigos offers to adolescents and young people in Santa Cruz communities, both boys and girls.

These workshops are provided for students ranging from elementary to high school, where the ideas of gender, societal norms, and equality are being shaped. The inclusion of both boys and girls in these conversations is essential, raising everyone's voice and working toward a healthy and prosperous future for all.

INVESTING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

We are proud to provide 48 scholarships this year to support middle school, high school, and university studies. Since 2002, the number of young men and women motivated to continue their studies and qualify for a scholarship continues to grow, representing the increasing prioritization of education that is happening as a result of Amigos' 25 years of investment in education in the community.

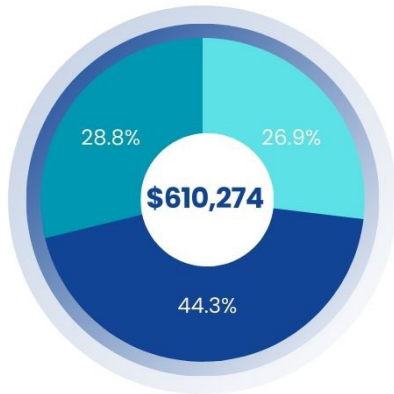
Girls in our community face even greater barriers to higher education graduation, due to traditional values that prioritize boys' education in the family and regulate girls to household responsibilities. Despite this challenge, girls represent 60% of our current scholarship students! Amigos provides additional tutoring, mentoring, and computer access to help them succeed. These scholarships forge empowered women with greater confidence in their potential as active agents within their families and community.



USE OF FUNDS 2022

MEET THE AMIGO'S TEAM

INCOME



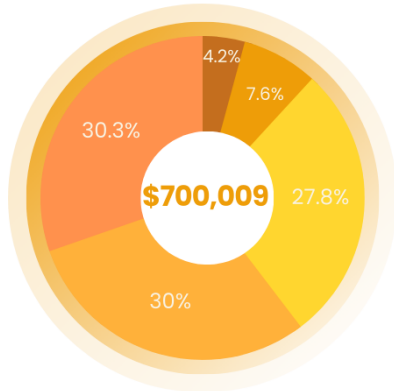
- Social Business/Program Income
- Foundations & Grants
- Individual Donations



DID YOU KNOW?

We are proud that our staff are 94% Guatemalan, that more than 74% come from Santa Cruz or one of its surrounding towns, and that more than 55% are women. This staff structure allows us to truly know the community we serve and build the trust we need for our programs to be accepted and sustainable in the long term.

EXPENSES



- Fundraising
- Admin
- Social Businesses
- Economic Empowerment
- Education & Youth

PRODUCTS DIRECT FROM WOMEN ARTISANS

Do you know where the products you buy come from and by whom they are made? Products in our Manos Cruceñas Artisan Store are handmade by 65 women artisans from Santa Cruz who trained in our vocational program, and they earn a fair wage for their work. Manos Cruceñas offers a range of products from jewelry to home accessories. You can purchase in our retail store in Santa Cruz as well as online. Visit our website or scan the attached QR code.



<https://www.amigosdesantacruz.org/store/>

SPECIAL THANK YOU TO...

Amigos de Jaibalito
Beyond Our Borders
CG Charitable
Chances for Children Intl.
Friend of Amigos
Girl Rising
Linda Vista Foundation
Maya Educational Foundation
Rotary International
SG Foundation
USAID/ International Office of Migration

And over 530 passionate and generous donors around the world

SUPPORT OUR WORK TODAY!



Please consider giving generously this year to help us break the cycle of poverty in Santa Cruz.

DONATE ONLINE

www.amigosdesantacruz.org/donate

SEND A CHECK

Amigos de Santa Cruz Foundation
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Seattle, WA 98102

OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO
SUPPORT US TODAY!

For more information and to sign up for monthly e-newsletters, visit:
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