



NEWSLETTER 2021-2022

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



Dear Friends,

Well over a year into the COVID-19 crisis, its negative effects continue to hit hard in the Santa Cruz communities.

Vaccination rates are abysmal and hospitals are at capacity, a generation of students are dropping out of school, non-COVID healthcare access has dropped dramatically, and ongoing shutdowns and travel restrictions have left over 30% of the community still out of work.

Navigating this new reality has been challenging. Yet I am proud to share how the Amigos team has found innovative solutions to tackle this challenge, to ensure that advances in education and economic empowerment continue during this difficult time. Youth trainings moved online, children share videos of educational activities over WhatsApp groups, and scholarship students receive extra tutoring to make up for the difficulties they face in virtual learning.

Led by the local community, we are laying the groundwork for sustainable community tourism in order to be prepared for when the economy recovers. We are supporting students in their efforts to complete high school and university, and empowering women businesses owners who are working outside the home for the first time. We are also backing initiatives to protect and preserve our local environment, the backbone of a healthy community.

People in Santa Cruz are not giving up, but are working harder than ever and I hope you are as inspired as I am by the stories of resilience and hope presented in this newsletter. With your help, we can continue to build educational and economic opportunities that will shape a stronger and healthier Santa Cruz. Please join us and support our work today.

Jessie Cohn, Executive Director

EMPOWERMENT IN ACTION



SUPPORTING WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES

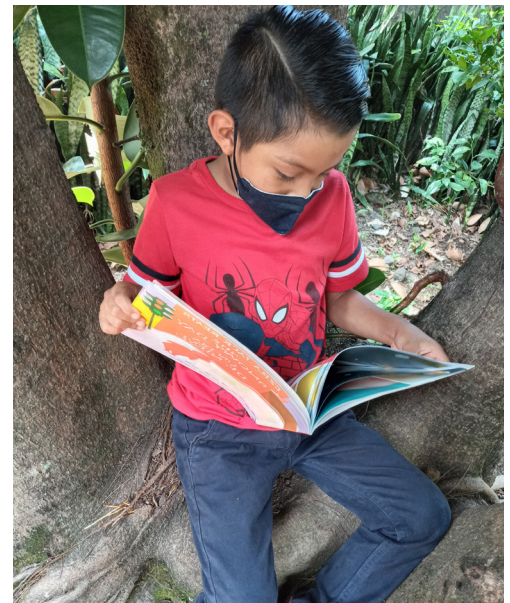
Meet Rosa, Candelaria and Juana, business owners and participants in Amigos' Women's Empowerment Program!

This organic egg cooperative in the village of Jaibalito is run by 14 local women. Increasing demand for local, organic eggs has led the women to significantly expand their business and sales this year. As part of their business training, the women are also successfully moving away from individual sales and creating contracts with local restaurants and hotels to create more stable demand and increase order quantities.

Our program empowers local women by increasing their participation in the local economy through supporting the establishment of women-owned small businesses. Participants develop entrepreneurial skills and build self-esteem by becoming small business owners. Many of these women are single mothers, and for most, this is their first time earning income outside of the home. Amigos staff also provides support to them in areas such as gender equality in the home, domestic violence prevention and nutrition. The program currently provides support to 16 businesses and over 60 women.

INSPIRING A LOVE FOR READING

Our Afternoon Reading Program is changing attitudes toward education in Santa Cruz. Children are discovering the joy of reading, and in doing so are developing a positive association with learning. By engaging with what they read through conversation, writing, theater and art, they are learning critical thinking and analytical skills not taught in Guatemalan public schools. This will have a huge impact on their future, encouraging them to stay in school longer and learn more. Many in their parents' generation did not learn to read and write, yet parents are now learning to read a book at home with their kids. These kids are grabbing a good book to read every chance they get!



INVESTING IN THE FUTURE



TRAINING LOCAL COMMUNITY GUIDES

This year, our CECAP Vocational Training Center **launched its first Community Tour Guide Training Course** in conjunction with INTECAP, the Guatemalan vocational training body.

Over seven months, students learned to design and lead their own guided tours by blending together elements of nature, culture, and history to create a rich experience for visitors to the area. The graduates of the program will become some of the first nationally certified Community Tour Guides; in Santa Cruz. Upon graduation,

Amigos will provide support to help them start their own tour and guide businesses.

This is a major milestone for community tourism in Santa Cruz. Currently, most tours in the area are delivered by guides from outside of the community. This training course has allowed graduates to have access to a new avenue of skilled jobs, thus strengthening the economy via increased and more sustainable tourism while honoring the environmental and cultural heritage of the area.



MEET ÁVILA CHUMIL

PEER YOUTH LEADER-SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Ávila, 25, comes from the remote Santa Cruz community of Chuitzanchaj and joined the group of local SRH Promoters in 2019. Through the monthly workshops she learned to cope with fear and shame, and also that a person's self-esteem, health and life choices are affected by their under-

standing of sexual and reproductive health. Equipped with this knowledge, she now speaks to other young people in her community about their sexuality and reproductive health without fear or shame. She has even educated her mother who herself now teaches other women in the community.

"My family used to lock me in the house to keep me about learning sex education. Now I no longer hide as I know information can help my community. And now, my husband and I have decided to plan when to have our first child."

OUR SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

- Training teachers to break the taboo and better teach SRH education in public schools.
- Conducting house visits to educate mothers of teenage children on SRH topics.
- Educating young people in each of the 7 Santa Cruz villages to become SRH resources for other youth in their own community.

ACTING BIG TO PROTECT THE LAKE

The threats to environmental health in Santa Cruz are immense and Amigos is stepping up efforts to engage in environmental policy advocacy that will have a big impact. One such initiative, pictured here, is to advocate for the closure of an illegal trash dump where waste from many areas around Lake Atitlan is dumped and burned just above the town. We are also engaging in initiatives such as developing a regional

plastic-recycling center; improving the municipal solid-waste system; and instituting a well functioning water-treatment plant.

Success on these issues will not be easy, but the effort is necessary. Without big changes, the natural beauty of Santa Cruz could be lost, and with it the advances in education and economic empowerment that we at Amigos are working to promote.



CREATING JOBS TODAY



NEW DESIGNS TO PROVIDE MORE ARTISAN INCOME

Over the last year, the team at the Manos Cruceñas Artisan Store has been hard at work developing new designs for all of our product lines across the store. These new designs are purposely centered around locally produced fabrics, thereby increasing income to local artisans while ensuring ethical sourcing for all of our products.

Moving away from using fabrics sourced from outside the community has involved the retraining of local artisans, particularly in using the traditional backstrap loom to create modern and globally attractive designs while still paying homage to local traditions. Buyers will still see touches of familiar patterns and techniques in the artisans' hand embroidery and brocade and in the color palettes. Stay tuned in 2022 for product launch dates and our updated wholesale and retail catalogues!



TRAINING TOMORROW'S TOP CHEFS

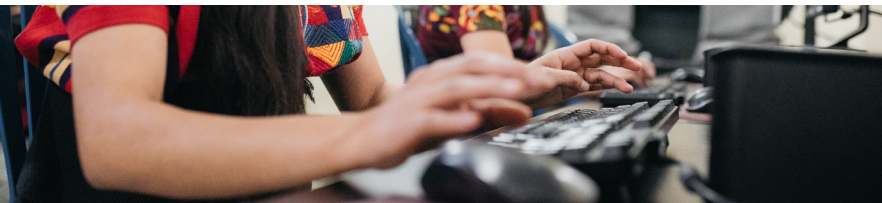
Now in its 10th year, the Culinary Program in our CECAP Vocational Training Center equips highly motivated youth from Santa Cruz to become the culinary leaders of tomorrow. Graduates find skilled, well-paying work that they can be proud of in our own Café Sabor Cruceño or with other hotels and restaurants around the lake.

Students learn basic culinary skills and fundamentals of Guatemalan and international cuisine, as well as math and English skills, computation, and nutrition theory. Café Sabor Cruceño provides a working café for students to learn, and 100% of the permanent staff are themselves graduates of the program! Kitchen personnel design the menus, cook, oversee café management, organize groups and special events, and provide the top-quality customer service that has made the café the top-rated restaurant in the area!

MEASURING OUR IMPACT

At Amigos, we are constantly looking for ways to improve the monitoring and evaluation of our impact in the Santa Cruz communities. Last year, Amigos staff began implementing a custom-made participant cloud database across all of our programs. This database centralizes information on our program participants, thus eliminating the time staff previously spent sorting through multiple and separate Excel data sheets. It also creates a baseline and roadmap through which we can measure the short and long-term impact that our programs have on the lives of individuals, families and the community.

We know that the quality of people's lives are changing for the better through greater access to educational and economic opportunities. With Amigos' new software, we are improving our ability to collect and analyze the quantitative data to show it!



HIGHER EDUCATION ON THE RISE

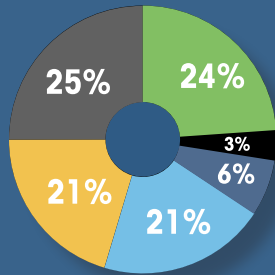
This year we are supporting **46** students in their efforts to obtain higher education, 31 at the high-school level and 15 at university. This represents a **31% increase over last year!**

In response to the difficulties our students face in online learning, we also provide computer access and extra tutoring sessions. These determined young people are breaking the cycle of poverty by proving that higher education is possible for the youth of Santa Cruz.

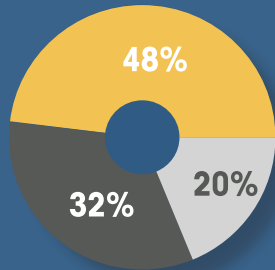
65% OF CURRENT SANTA CRUZ STUDENTS ARE WOMEN!

USE OF FUNDS 2020

TRANSFORMING GENEROUS
SUPPORT INTO REAL IMPACT.



USE OF OPERATING FUNDS



OPERATING REVENUE



HONORING OUR DONORS

Carson Foundation
SG Foundation
Friends of Amigos
Amigos de Jaibalito
John Brown Family Foundation
Miracles In Action
Maya Educational Foundation
Chances for Children International
Temple Emmanuel
Global Mitzvah Project
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 a local, indigenous-led organization, with 85% of our staff coming from the Santa Cruz communities themselves! Many of the young men and women on our team were recipients of the first education aid program for children when Amigos launched 23 years ago, and are now on our staff and dedicated to lead-

ing change within their own community.

As part of our mission to create generational change in Santa Cruz, we support our local staff with professional development and career opportunities that increase their capabilities and unleash their potential.

We are proud to lead Amigos and to be making a difference in our own community. Thanks to Amigos, the next generation will have many more opportunities for a better future.

~Rosalía Simón Pérez and Estela Simaj
Program Directors



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

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