

# ***La Casita***

a centre of learning and support for  
Guatemalan children, youth and vulnerable elders

**San Antonio Palopó**  
**Guatemala**

## Team Members

Susan Gage

Mary Lynch

Kathy Coster

Linda Stanton

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Penny Pattison





San Antonio Palopó, Guatemala

## ***La Casita***

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***La Casita*** is an initiative of Innovative Communities.Org. The ***La Casita*** team primarily works with the Maya community of San Antonio Palopó, on Lake Atitlan, Guatemala. It is a place of incredible beauty, edged by volcanoes, and surrounded by small picturesque villages. But when you enter one of these villages you find very poor people trying to eke out a living through weaving and farming, on steep hillsides subject to torrential storms and occasional landslides. Because of economic reasons, climate change, or gang related violence many young people are forced to leave. With education and training they can thrive in their own communities and become tomorrow's leaders.

We support a Learning Centre and Library, offer hot lunches for elderly widows (Ancianas), train young adults to create employment opportunities for themselves, and provide scholarships for students.

We sell scarves, handwoven in the village, to raise funds in Canada, as well as accept tax-receiptable donations. We are a small group of 6 volunteers from Vancouver Island, B.C., and one volunteer from Spokane, Washington, who lives several months of the year in San Antonio. We pay all our own travel and living expenses, so every penny we raise goes to support these projects.

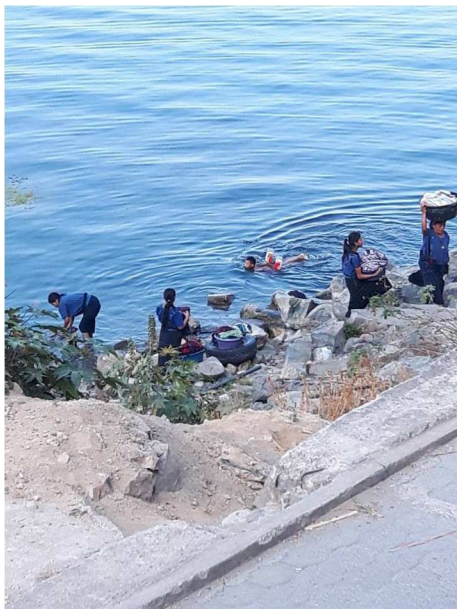




San Antonio Palopó, Guatemala











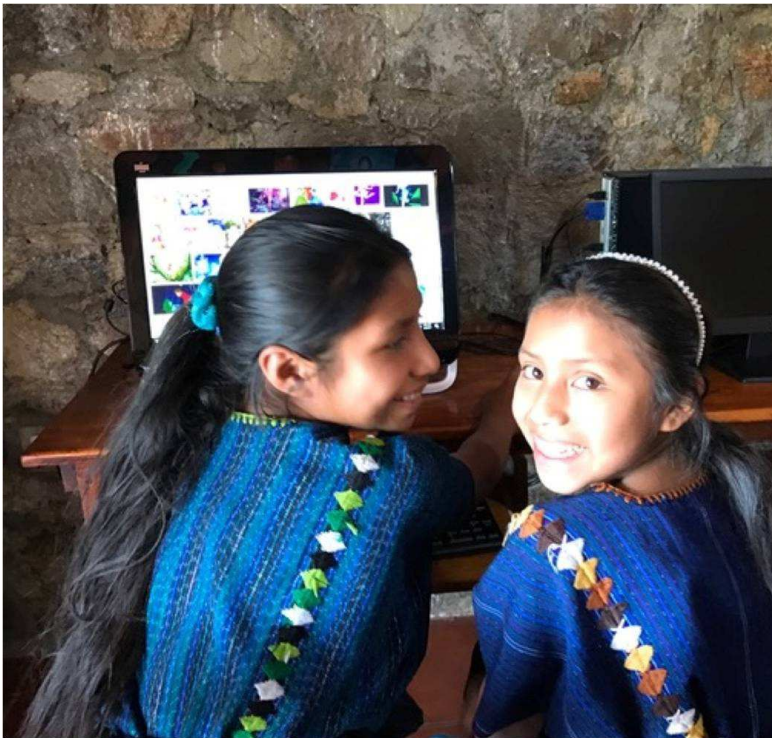
## ***La Casita*** **Learning Centre and Library**

In 2010, we supported a small community centre in San Antonio Palopó, a Maya town, facing enormous problems of poverty and lack of education. We called it ***La Casita***, offering a variety of programs for everyone from preschool to seniors. In 2017 we worked with the community to establish a multi-use Learning Centre and Library. During a typical week, 125 students come: some sent by their teachers for special learning assistance, others to use the computers, get help with homework, or just read. Plus now there's a small mobile library that reaches out to Middle School students. This year, the Learning Centre offered a course for recent graduates to help them with job and entrepreneurial-skills. And it's working!





Our Teacher, Yesenia, and her happy students.









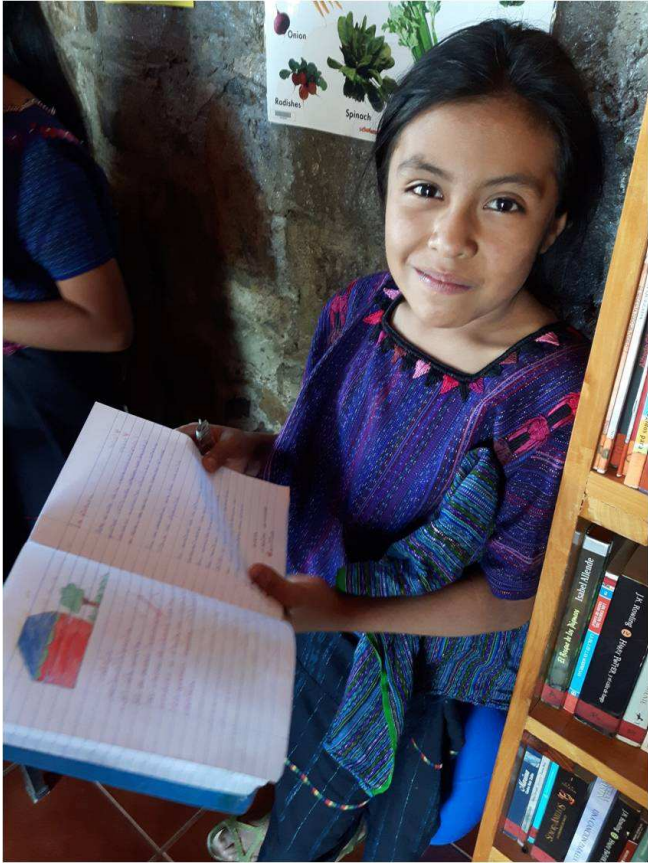


## New Books for the Library

In mid-January, 2019, four of our *La Casita* team climbed on the plane heading for San Antonio Palopó. En route, we stopped in Mexico City for a book-buying binge. Loaded with books on every possible subject, we arrived in San Antonio Palopó, and were delighted to find the Learning Centre buzzing with energy.









# Scholarship Students

School fees, supplies and transportation costs make it impossible for most San Antonio students to continue past elementary school without help. We provide scholarships for students whose families can't afford the costs of education - to graduate from high school and in some cases to go on to university or follow a trade.

In turn, they volunteer in the community and at **La Casita** helping younger students.

The hope is that with an education and training they can continue to live at home with their families, become leaders in their community, and have productive lives.







Volunteers preparing lunch for the Ancianas.



Our wonderful Administrators, Candelaria and Gregorio with scholarship student, Jose, who is learning to be a chef.





Scholarship students are encouraged to finish school and train for jobs that will allow them to be successful in their own village.





## Supporting the Ancianas

Life isn't easy for the *Ancianas* - elderly widows - in San Antonio Palopó who don't have family support. Often they are hungry and isolated, living in tiny makeshift dwellings. For the past several years we have invited these women to lunch twice a week. Not only do they get a full, nourishing lunch with vegetables from our garden, but they get to socialize, do activities, and have fun together.











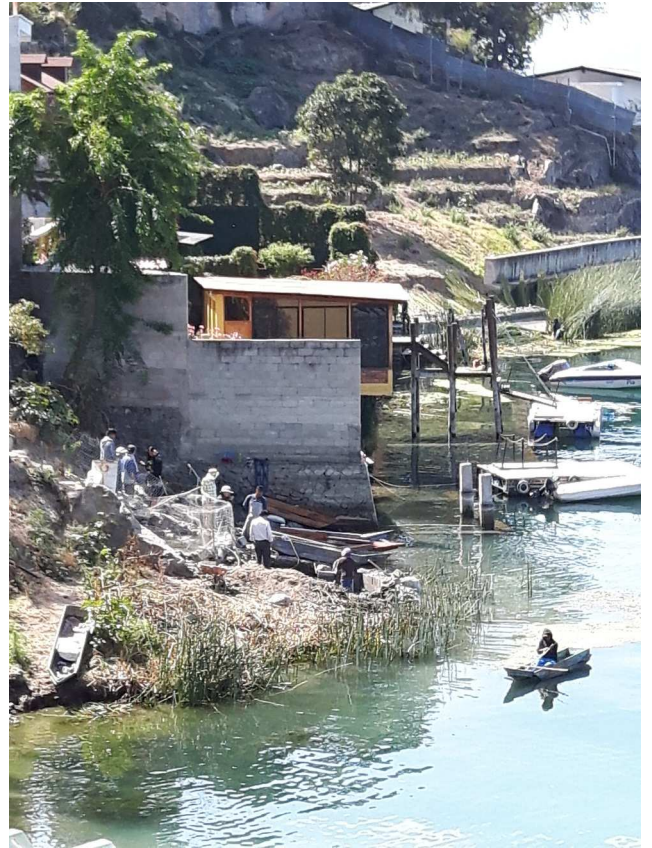
## Young Entrepreneurs

This year we tackled another problem - the lack of jobs for graduates. Fifteen young adults are learning entrepreneurial skills, starting a mushroom-growing business, taking cooking lessons, and developing ponds to raise tilapia for local consumption. They have just started a part-time cafe after lots of preparation and training and are starting to sell their fish.





Building a Talapia Pool on the edge of Lake Atitlan.



Above: The Tilapia are growing!



Right: First day for the Cafe!





## Stoves for Health

Since the start of our work in San Antonio Palopó we have replaced 1500 open hearth fires with fuel-efficient, wood burning, vented stoves. Now, we do an annual check of these stoves to ensure they're functioning efficiently, and help families pay for needed replacement parts.







Volunteers working in the Casita Garden



## A New School for San Antonio

Finally, almost 10 years after a landslide damaged their school, San Antonio Palopó children are getting a new school. We are hoping to help with a library and equipment.







## Weaving the Scarves

More than 30 women from the village, primarily from 2 co-operatives, weave the scarves that we sell to raise funds.

Many of the women can't afford and/or don't have space for a foot loom. Most of the scarves we sell are woven using the traditional Mayan back-strap loom, although women are increasingly banding together to buy foot looms,

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## **Thanks to our generous donors!**

It is due to your support that we are able to continue and expand these programs ... enabling young people to become leaders in their community and to find new ways of tackling economic issues and the effects of climate change.

The **La Casita** Team:

Susan Gage, Mary Lynch, Kathy Coster, Linda Stanton, Kim Haney, Sue Bailey, Penny Pattison  
[InnovativeCommunities.Org](http://InnovativeCommunities.Org) At Work in Guatemala



People involved in **La Casita** are always pleased to welcome donors who come to visit, like Robbie, surrounded by scholarship students.

**Donations are gratefully accepted!!**

Charitable tax No. BN/871126249RR0001

You may ....

Write a cheque to Innovative Communities Foundation (write San Antonio Education/Community on the memo line) and send it to: ICO Foundation 300-722 Cormorant St., Victoria, BC V8W 1P8

Or donate online at:

[Innovativecommunities.org/communities/guatemala/san-antonio-education](http://Innovativecommunities.org/communities/guatemala/san-antonio-education)

For more information: [icoatitlan.blogspot.com](http://icoatitlan.blogspot.com)

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