**2021-2022 SEPA Annual Report**

**August 1, 2022**

For the past 25 years, the Santa Elena Project of Accompaniment has remained steadfast in its mission to support education in the returned refugee communities of Santa Elena 20 de Octubre and Copal AA La Esperanza in northern Guatemala, in addition to providing support for accompaniers working to protect human rights defenders through NISGUA (Network in Solidarity with Guatemala).

Our work continues to be profoundly shaped by the global Covid pandemic, though some elements of our work have slowly begun to return to normal with the rollout of effective vaccines in the US and in Guatemala. Unfortunately, the Covid pandemic hit the rural highlands of Guatemala hard, with the regional urban centers of Coban and Cantabal being strongly impacted. The communities reported overflowing public hospitals in the first half of the year, though fortunately, there has not been a severe outbreak in either community we serve. Education has begun to return to normal as well. The community of Copal AA completed construction on a large auditorium for the New Dawn Middle School, and also renovated their computer classroom. This upgrade was required by the local education authority and was financed in part by special funding from SEPA.

Accompaniment continues to be strongly impacted by the pandemic. NISGUA is beginning the process of returning staff to Guatemala, and is now starting to recruit accompaniers for a revamped international accompaniment program with a renewed commitment to advocacy and lifting up the voices of Guatemalan human rights activists.

In fulfilling our mission this year, we undertook the following activities (numbers drawn from 3/21-3/22 report):

**Provided salaries for three teachers in Copal AA’s community middle school:**

SEPA provided **$14,700** in funds for the salaries of three of Copal AA’s middle school teachers.

**Scholarships for Santa Elena students:**Given that the government only funds an elementary school at Santa Elena, SEPA provides funds for students to continue their education past 6th grade by attending middle and high school in the nearest city. This year, **$5000** was provided in scholarships to students.

**Stipend for Santa Elena school director and teachers:**SEPA provided **$4349** for ongoing training and related travel expenses for Santa Elena’s teachers, which has helped the government-funded elementary school attract additional monies for school programs, such as the school lunch program.

**Fiscal sponsorship for the fundraising activities of Heather Dean on behalf of Copal AA’s middle school:**

SEPA supports the fundraising activities of Columbus former accompanier Heather Dean in fundraising for Instituto Basico Nuevo Amanacer (New Dawn Middle School). In the past fiscal year, SEPA has provided processing capacity for over $4,000 in donations raised by Heather for the school’s operations. We are also pleased to report that Appalachian State University in North Carolina conducted a delegation to Copal AA, with help from Heather. Regular delegations serve an important role in keeping the links between our communities strong, and we are delighted to see that there are new avenues of possibility to see other another face-to-face with the easing of the pandemic.

All of these activities were made possible by your generosity. We were not able to hold the fundraising dinner this year due to ongoing public health concerns, so your direct support was even more important. Thank you for buying masks, firewood, and more from SEPA at the farmers’ market. Thank you for your donations.

**Most of all, thank you for your support of Copal AA, Santa Elena, and the ties that connect us.**