

The Atitlan Alliance Newsletter December 2023

Dear sponsors and friends of Atitlan Alliance. We hope that this newsletter finds you well. Our organization continues to grow and thrive thanks to your generous support.

A note from the Board Chair, Laura Emery

Despite the unrest in Guatemala, another successful school year has drawn to a close. As you may be aware, the academic calendar year in Guatemala begins in January and runs through the start of November. Our students are now on their "summer vacation" which lasts until the third week of January.

All thirty-two sponsored students have done well in school and will be ready to move up, as well as the five kindergarten and first graders that we helped to start school.

So far, Atitlan Alliance has expanded through word of mouth and our website. And the word is spreading rapidly. Our 10/12/23 Donor Appreciation Event was a big success. Our goal for the 2024 school year is to sponsor fifty students, plus provide backpacks, school supplies and shoes for twenty "pequeños" or young kids so they can start school.

School is especially important because the main language in San Pedro is a local Mayan dialect. Once in school, kids learn Spanish, which greatly expands their opportunities and opens doors in their future.

We can't save the world, but with your help we are making a big difference in the lives of these children who would not otherwise be in school.

Many thanks,

Laura

Program Director Activities

During the year, Rosa, our program director in Guatemala held various service activities in San Pedro in which students and their parents or guardians came together to directly contribute their community by cleaning garbage from the beachfront.



These activities build stronger ties in the community and widen the impact of our organization. Rosa also held two events just with the students to reinforce the expectations of our program and the importance of good study habits.

Sponsor Testimonial

There is nothing like sponsoring a student and knowing that a world of opportunities is opening to them by attending school. One of our sponsors generously agreed to write about her experience as a sponsor to students in our program, and we hope it will inspire others to consider participating or to continue supporting our program.

Testimony by Delores Nims:

I have been on the Board of Atitlan Alliance since its beginning because I am passionate about helping girls get an education. Education is the path

out of poverty. Research shows that when we educate a girl, we help a family and a community. This is my passion because someone helped me get an education. I grew up poor, living on a truck farm in Washington State. No parent or teacher ever talked with me about going to college, but my Lutheran minister did. I obtained a four-year scholarship for me to Pacific Lutheran College in Tacoma, Washington. This gift transformed not only my life but the lives of my children and grandchildren.

Starting in 2000, I spent 14 years visiting Guatemala, studying Spanish and volunteering. I fell in love with the people and this beautiful country but Guatemala is one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere. Few children make it pass 6th grade. I want to give others the opportunity that was given to me.

Student success story



We are so proud of Rosario Quem Toc who recently graduated from high school. Pictured at her graduation ceremony (standing on the right in this photo), she has received financial aid from an Atitlan Alliance sponsor for the past two years.

Rosario has expressed her gratitude for our support that has made her high school diploma a reality. With a degree in business administration, Rosario plans to join the workforce. Congratulations, Rosario!

An update on the political situation in Guatemala

This has been an extremely challenging year for Guatemala and its citizens. In brief, Bernardo Arevalo, running on an anti-corruption platform from, won the presidential elections in a landslide victory. Protests over interference in the outcome of the presidential brought the country to a standstill and had an impact on the end of the school year for our students. Democracy and political stability

in Guatemala are essential to regional and US interests, including migration and drug smuggling.

On October 23rd Guatemalans shut down roads and other vital links for commerce to protest those in the government who appear to undermine democracy in the Central American country. The protests lasted for a number of weeks and continue sporadically. Specifically, the protesters are asking for the public prosecutor, Maria Consuelo Porras to resign. She has been leading a group in the government to stop the transfer of Presidential power to Mr. Arevalo. She is also accused of corruption by the US government.

Echoing events following the 2020 US elections, those in power are claiming without evidence that the elections were fraudulent. When the ballots were recounted and the results remained the same, they suggested Mr. Arevalo's party, Semillas, was fraudulently formed and should be dissolved.

Though the courts are divided on the fate of Semillas, hopes are that Mr. Arevalo will be sworn in on January 14th, 2024. Business leaders are supporting him, and fears of US and European sanctions are putting pressure on the elites to allow the transition of presidential powers to occur.

However, the struggle continues; on November 17th, prosecutors filed a request to strip Arevalo and his running mate Karin Herrera of their political immunity and be prosecuted for supporting student protests at University of San Carlos, Guatemala's sole public university, through social media posts.

In late November, a high-level group of government officials from the US traveled to Guatemala to encourage the democratic process to proceed without interference. Then, on December 11th, the US government-imposed visa restrictions on nearly 300 Guatemalan officials for persistent attempts to annul the victory of Arevalo.

There is a glimmer of hope. After the prosecutor's office sought to annul the election results amid accusations of an "attempted coup", Guatemala's electoral court last Friday insisted the results were "unchangeable". Blanca Alfaro, the head of the Supreme Election Tribunal in Guatemala, affirmed that Arevalo and his vice president, Karin Herrera, would take office as planned. "At this moment, there is no way that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal is going to repeat the elections."

The Atitlan Alliance helps students in an indigenous community of Guatemala located on the shores of Lake Atitlan. The Atitlan Alliance Board is made up entirely of volunteers. Your donations go directly to pay the tuition and uniform costs for children who would otherwise be unable to afford an education once government-funded education ends after age 12. Please click on the image below to access our GoFundMe page and contribute your tax-deductible donation today.



Education is a path out of generational poverty. Please click on the image to donate through our [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com) page.

With many thanks from the Atitlan Alliance board, from our students, and from their families, we wish everyone a Healthy and Happy Holiday Season!

Spencer Neyland, Board Secretary
December 2023