

UIW Guatemala Solidarity Trip, May 2023, v. 2 Planting Eight Garden Plots



As the UIW Guatemala Solidarity travelers learned of the Mayan lunar calendar which helped people know when to plant the vegetables encircling it, they could feel a sense of satisfaction that they had planted eight garden plots of vegetables in an area where malnutrition has been a serious problem. While starting a garden in San Antonio, Texas, can take some physical labor, building gardens in rural areas of Chimaltenango where one needs to climb steep hills to get to the families' homes takes generosity and love, as much as physical labor!



Three UIW Elementary Education majors, Amil Bettencourt, Carley Petru, and Aislinn Villarreal, two UIW Nutrition majors, Shania Salinas and Vallery Roberts, and two faculty Sister Martha Ann Kirk and Dr. Beth Senne-Duff, assisted by Mr. Mark Duff who is fluent in Spanish and has expertise in nature work, worked with the two founders of the Little Angels of Mary www.littleangelsmary.org who are former UIW students in the Santa Apolonia area of Chimaltenango.



Edwin Mendoza and Darlene Jasso, the founder of the Little Angels of Mary, have been teaching in a good school in Guatemala City. They wanted to help educate the indigenous people in rural villages who have been disadvantaged. They want the descendants of the Mayan to be able to keep their culture and their language, to be affirmed rather than have their culture obliterated. As Darlene and Edwin learned more and more about malnutrition and how it can stunt both body and mind, they decided that they need to start with nutrition assistance and then think of education. It is hard to think about reading when you are hungry!

See the Little Angels of Mary YouTube Channel to get to know the children, the mothers, and the families.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC0NgYDySF0tCSeYbNIG9wTw>



In the Lake Atitlan area of Guatemala a gardening method that promotes intensive growth, but only takes a small plot of land, had been developed. Cultiva International <https://www.cultivainternational.org/>, an organization in Guatemala that provides and builds gardens for families around the lake, shared their knowledge with Little Angels of Mary about their gardening method. Edwin and Darlene taught the UIW travelers this method and by about the third garden the group was getting pretty good! Also Carolina Ajozal, who works for the Little Angels teaching preschool in the village assisted building the gardens. She speaks Kaqchikel and Spanish and could explain things to the mothers about the gardens. She often goes back and visits the families to encourage them in the gardening.



To be eligible for a garden, the eight mothers committed to a year of monthly workshops on nutrition for their families. Also in these workshops, the children under five are weighed and measured. Unfortunately, many of these children are malnourished. The workshops are given in Kaqchikel, the indigenous language spoken in the villages.

Schools are in Spanish so often the mothers have only had a few years of school. Carolina serves as the translator for the workshops. See a film about the “Healthy Mothers, Healthy Children” - Nutrition Program (English - Kaqchikel) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=POtrSE0IOh0&t=162s> which Carolina narrated.



In the morning Edwin and Mark Duff would go and purchase trays of little seedlings, large bags of compost, and wood. To build these garden plots, first a frame needs to be built that is 4 by 8 feet. Mark Duff who is experienced in wood work had the idea of bringing drills and tools. Carley, became an expert drilling the holes to join the wood with screws.



The plastic sacks that compost has come are cut to make flat cloths. These are used for the bottom of the garden plot and will help the garden retain moisture and this help the growth of the plants. The compost is poured in the frame. Carolina and the mother of the family who will have the garden poured compost.



A “latch work” of wood is nailed over the frame. This is to indicate the layout for planting. Certain plants go in each of the squares.



Aislinn, one of the Education majors said, “As we are working on the gardens, the families we are making them for are open and so welcoming. They helped us so much as we helped them, and they gave us drinks, one family gave us carrot juice!”

































A large variety of vegetables is planted so that there can be a “rainbow” variety. In the Nutrition workshops, mothers learn that you seek a “rainbow” of colors of vegetables. That is more nutritious.



The most expensive part of the project is the chicken wire to build a fence to protect the vegetables. About a \$100 worth of wire is needed. Building the gate and the latch with wire takes time and skill.



CANTIDAD DE SEMILLAS O PILONES POR CADA CUADRO

<p>Brocoli</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>epi gii</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>Rabano</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Acelga</p>  <p>4</p>
<p>Acelga</p>  <p>4</p>	<p>Cebolla</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>R-olxu</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>Brocoli</p>  <p>9</p>
<p>Coliflor</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Macy / Quilete</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Zan.abori*</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>R;aJJano</p>  <p>16</p>
<p>Zanahoria</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Remolacha</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>Espinaca</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>C:liflor</p>  <p>16</p>
<p>Brocoli</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>Acelga</p>  <p>4</p>	<p>Zanahoria</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Rtmobcbao</p>  <p>9</p>
<p>Rabano</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Espinaca</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>Rtpollo</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>a ocoli</p>  <p>9</p>
<p>Coliflo,</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Z.V;;lon..</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Cebolb</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>Acelga</p>  <p>4</p>
<p>Macy / Quilete</p>  <p>16</p>	<p>Repele</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>Espinaca</p>  <p>9</p>	<p>ColifIH</p>  <p>16</p>

a bi fr. dijo Dio;; *- n. Yo le: e dado a lJstedes cada p iiii que da wmilli co aye
:uperf,c;;e de roda la tierra. y rodo a,bo/ qve r" ne frvro e da temilla: em>le.: -ervira de alimemo.*

Finally each little seedling is planted with care and the number and variety are according to this chart. The goal of this program is to improve the food and nutritional security of low-income families who have children under 5 years old.

Andrea Guzman, the Nutrition Consultant, among the extensive resources on the ProyetoCAN site has a section on agriculture <https://proyetcocan.org/agricultura-2/> Whether in rural Guatemala or in the large city of San Antonio, “a garden for all” makes so much sense. Each family can benefit from a garden.

<https://proyetcocan.org/produccion-familiar-huertos-familiares/>

The CAN website links with ECHO <https://proyetcocan.org/echo-community-garden-toolkit-ingles/> that stands for “Educational Concern for Hunger Organization” Community Garden Assistance.



Dr. Beth Senne-Duff and Mark Duff prepared wood for the gardens. While students who are beginning their careers took part in this service project to learn, Mark Duff, retired from Texas A&M, took part in this because he finds deep meaning and joy in service. Mark, a Certified Forester and Master Arborist, contributed much to trip as an excellent translator and as one skilled in carpentry, gardening, and knowledge of nature. He brings such deep care for the disadvantaged. He says, "Having lived in Latin

America and the US equally for nearly half of my 66 years, I realize how little most of us in the US understand how lucky we are. Most of us complain and show hostility toward many of our neighbors just because we have different opinions. Yet we have more than adequate food, shelter, clean water, transportation, medical care and freedom to express our political views without government intervention. This is something most people of Guatemala do not have, yet they are happy and loving people. We should count our blessings. It is a joy to be able to help out the little we can.”



Amil, one of the Education majors noted, “Working in the village today was extremely rewarding. Working in a community where everyone shares the goal of ensuring the future health and education of their children was a wonderful experience.” Amil benefited from “work on the garden boxes and work in a way that is efficient. With the boxes it helped build our teamwork and communication skills because we just wanted to make sure we were staying on schedule and getting what we needed done. We all got together and were successful in this goal. Today was an amazing start to this journey and I feel so fulfilled. I cannot wait to continue this work with such amazing people.”



In the middle of the workday, mothers hosted the Solidarity Travelers for lunch. Visiting the homes of the people was a real privilege. They use wood in their stoves to cook. The sinks for washing the dishes are outside---and the hospitality and love are all around!



In the homes we learned how they cook and how they weave and embroider in such beautiful ways. Aislinn, one of the Education majors said, “When we eat with the families, they are nothing but warm and welcoming. They open their homes to us and make some of the best food I have ever had! Whenever someone drives by they give a little honk to say hello, this is the norm in the villages. Something that shows how connected and how strong they are as a community. This is such an amazing place even though they don't have a lot. I have fallen in love with this beautiful place and I hope to be able to return.”



News compiled and shared by Incarnate Word Sister Martha Ann Kirk, Th.D. <https://www.uiw.edu/chass/directory/faculty-and-staff/kirk-martha-ann.html> who has had the privilege of taking students and community members on solidarity trips since 1979. Assisted by Darlene Jasso, a UIW Communication Arts Graduate now serving as Vice-President for Communications for the Little Angels of Mary.