

Title: The Migrant Peacebuilding Project

Location: Ciudad de Guatemala, Guatemala

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College: Colby College, Waterville ME, USA

Website and Blog: www.migrantpeacebuilding.org

Section One

Summary: Our primary goal for this project was to provide sustainable employment opportunities to Guatemalan nationals who have been deported from the United States. We implemented an employment placement program, hosted educational seminars to connect former migrants with private sector employers, and fostered a greater understanding of the unique challenges facing deported migrants who are attempting to reintegrate into society and the formal labor market.

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Project Details: Upon arriving in Guatemala, we quickly discovered that we had underestimated the difficulty of connecting forcibly returned migrants with willing employers. Locating migrants was in and of itself a challenge, although we were eventually able to gain access to the landing point for ICE planes with the assistance of the International Organization for Migration, we found that the services offered to returning migrants were primarily limited to providing transportation to their homes in areas of the country other than Guatemala City. The IOM estimated that of approximately 150 migrants returned on each flight, only about 10 stayed in the city, and even within that small group, many left within a short period of time with the goal of either reuniting with family or attempting to re-migrate to the United States. Due to time and budget constraints, we were able to offer only very minimal job placement services outside of the city, which compounded the difficulty of locating eligible migrants.

By far the most difficult aspect of the program was confronting a widespread lack of interest from the business community, which was on the whole very reluctant to hire former migrants. The Guatemalan labor market is competitive for anyone, to say nothing of those who suffer from forms of social and labor discrimination, as well as other systemic problems that may pose a barrier to employment, such as lack of documentation for labor experience or educational history. Because of the difficulties inherent in navigating bureaucratic systems and establishing sustainable relationships with private sector businesses in the context of a very limited time frame, we resolved to alter our goal from an ongoing job placement program to a formal academic study and awareness-raising campaign, culminating in a final job fair to directly connect employers and migrants. We believe the change in direction allowed us greater efficiency in terms of actual effect than would have otherwise been possible. Despite this alteration in the group's focus, we did not abandon our ongoing program, and did find some success in organizing interviews and resume writing assistance for interested migrants.

Despite these challenges, the components of our project related to education, awareness-raising, and research were a resounding success. Our team conducted multiple educational presentations at local schools, where we worked to give students a broader view of the politics of migration and issues faced by returning migrants. Additionally, we successfully completed a formal study concerning perceptions of discrimination faced by migrants in Guatemalan civil society and the formal labor market. The

conclusions of our report are supported by data gathered from both qualitative and quantitative research methods. These include a perception study with a sample size of over 500 people, multiple focus group sessions, and numerous semi-structured personal interviews, which included conversations with CEOs, employers, aid workers, academics, an ICE official, a *coyote*, ordinary members of civil society, and migrants themselves. For a complete description of our methodology and findings, please see the full study attached to this report and available on our website: www.migrantpeacebuilding.org.

Our largest endeavor was the final job fair, held on August 18th at the Grand Tikal Futura Hotel. More than 12 companies, governmental organizations, and migrant aid groups had representatives on hand to distribute information, field questions, and hand out applications. We estimate that approximately 150 job seekers were in attendance, and businesses ranging from call centers to computer repair to the national police were offering positions. In addition to employment opportunities, the fair included a presentation of our research, a professional speaker providing interview tips and advice, a government-sponsored stand to assist people in obtaining documents needed for formal employment, and a resume writing workshop conducted with the assistance of local volunteers. The fair was a resounding success, and we received many positive comments from business representatives and job seekers alike. The fair even made the national news, which helped to raise awareness about the issue of migrant stigmatization.

Section Two

Peace: Peace is a state of calm, in which a person has the tool and the means to get what he needs and to make himself, his family, and his community feel secure and empowered about the future.

Long and Short Term Contributions to Peace: We believe we have succeeded in our original goal to connect migrants with sustainable employment in Guatemala. Although in our eyes the job fair was incredibly beneficial to the community in the short term, we realize with hundreds of migrants entering Guatemala City each week, a one-time event is not sufficient in terms of meaningfully addressing the problem. To this end, we believe the awareness-raising campaign may actually have a larger, albeit less immediately noticeable, long term effect. While direct employment stemming from our project is important and amazing to witness, our educational work and awareness-raising, which attempted to change the ways in which Guatemalan citizens and employers view migrants, will hopefully continue to have an effect after we have left the country. When people attended an event like the job fair, a seminar, heard a radio interview, or even just filled out a survey or participated in a focus group, they were forced to confront their own views and stereotypes about migrants and migration, and maybe even to see the issue in a new light. All in all, we felt we were very successful in challenging these original views. We hope that in some small way we contributed to people's being more open to working to understand others who may face different challenges, but who are ultimately not so different from themselves at all.

Changes: Our work has helped us to gain a better understanding of how difficult it is to translate a plan into action. We have also learned the importance of cooperation, partnership, and flexibility. Each person on the team expanded his understanding of poverty and the challenges inherent in the lives of the world's poor. We gained an even greater appreciation for the opportunities that we have available to us and reinforced our desire to do good for others with the skills we have.

Personal Statement: Seeing every day the challenges and roadblocks that the returning migrants faced would have been even more frustrating and depressing were it not for being part of a team. We encouraged each other and pulled together to accomplish everything we could with the time and the resources we had to have a positive impact on the migrants with whom we worked and those who would follow. This sort of work is hard, but rewarding and worthwhile. Sharing the work with others lightens the load and encourages new ideas. (Javier Monterroso Montenegro)



Project members tell elementary school students about the project and the challenges faced by those that have been forcibly removed from the United States.

Participants at the job fair receive CV/Resume building help



Participants in the job fair listen to a workshop on interview skills