

**Davis 100 Projects for Peace
Final Report - Summer 2007**

Title: Mi Refugio, Guatemala: Peace Through Education

School: Bucknell University

Student(s) Information:

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- 1. Project Summary:** Our project was a grassroots development project which aimed to make a difference at a small community level. The direct beneficiaries would be the women and their extended families as their sewing co-op developed into a profitable enterprise. Our project took place at Mi Refugio, a school in San Pedro, Sacatapequez, Guatemala.

Our original goals were as follows:

- **Purchase Equipment and Materials**
 - We intended to purchase up to four electric sewing machines, fabric, and other material including thread, bobbins, shears, pins, etc.
- **Grant Recipients Travel and Reside in Guatemala**
 - We planned to travel to Guatemala in the summer of 2007 and reside at Mi Refugio School.
- **Provide Classes and an Instructor**
 - We planned on providing sewing classes for students attending the school as part of their curriculum and women. In order to do this we intended on hiring an instructor from Guatemala for the summer.
- **Establish Leadership**
 - We planned to identify leaders within the group of women attending the sewing classes in order to keep the group together after we returned home.
- **Establish a Sewing Cooperative**
- **Instill Self-Esteem**
 - We intended for classes and knowledge gained to instill higher self-esteem.

- 2. Project Results:** Upon completion of this project our goals were fulfilled as follows:

- **Purchase Equipment and Materials**
 - Five electric sewing machines were distributed to Mi Refugio along with an industrial machine and an embroidery machine. Large quantities of fabric were bought at a local store. Shears, rolling cutters, cutting surfaces, pins, clothing patterns, thread, bobbins, and sewing machine accessories were also bought and distributed to Mi Refugio
- **Grant Recipients Travel and Reside in Guatemala**
 - We arrived in Guatemala on June 7, 2007 and resided at Mi Refugio for our entire stay, departing on June 30, 2007.
- **Provide Classes and an Instructor**
 - Approximately 85 students from kindergarten to sixth grade attended sewing classes, learning valuable sewing skills and creating projects such as aprons and pillows. After the school day was over, mothers and other

family members whose skill levels ranged from beginner to intermediate arrived to receive adult sewing lessons. Word was spread through these three women and children at the school, and by the end of the first week we had a regular attendance of nine women. A possible sewing instructor who is readily accessible was identified.

- **Establish Leadership**
 - Two women, Marta and Claudia, stood out among the rest because they had gained the respect of others and possessed valuable leadership skills and were thus identified as possible leaders for the group.
- **Establish a Sewing Cooperative**
 - We recruited potential co-op members, identified the most likely leaders from the group, and made the first step toward establishing a cooperative. Upon the recommendation of Kari Engen, we emphasized the development of skills. Ms. Engen also recommended that we first assess the participants' level of commitment before finalizing the actual cooperative membership.
- **Instill Self-Esteem**
 - As women completed projects, the sense of accomplishment and pride was evident. Ana, a woman who had never sewn before, stood tall and proud as she modeled her first finished project. Later, she sewed a skirt that she wore to church that Sunday. Daughters of the other women waited anxiously for their mothers to complete the dresses they were making for them. The adorable little girls shyly but proudly showed off their new dresses when they were finished.

3. Implications: Our project supports peace through the grassroots development of a sewing group that provides education and leadership opportunities in order to alleviate poverty in a marginalized community in Guatemala. Our guiding philosophy was that equal access to education and income opportunities are essential to a more peaceful society. We want to be sure the women understand the aims of a cooperative and that they will be in control of the decision-making process. Once the co-op is finalized, the women will begin to earn some much needed money.

Our future plans are to return to Mi Refugio in order to finalize the coop with the women and Kari Engen.

Through our project, we learned many valuable lessons about completing a grassroots project in a developing country. We learned that such a project requires excellent motivation, communication, organization, and negotiation skills. First, communication is key – that is, we learned firsthand how valuable direct communication is. Secondly, more important than the ability to plan is the ability to improvise, use the resources and materials available, and be flexible and creative in whatever situation that may arise. We realized that we had a great impact on the lives of the children and women we taught. It was evident in the small presents and many thanks we received as well as the tearful goodbyes that we had a profound impact on this wonderful group of people. This experience, made possible by the Kathryn Wasserman Davis Foundation, was the most rewarding experience of our lives.