

Sandprints of 2010

Nicolasa, age 18- Thriving Against All Odds

“Dentro de mi había algo muy fuerte que no me dejaba tranquila”

“Within me there was something so strong that would not let me sit still...”

18 year-old Nicolasa is a groundbreaker. She is the only one of her 11 siblings to study beyond primary school, and in 2011 she pioneers yet another path as she starts high school. It has been a struggle every step of the way, but she is only picking up momentum. Both of her parents are illiterate, and her father suffers from severe alcoholism. Neither of Nicolasa's parents initially accepted the idea of her studying beyond the 6th grade- there was too much work to be done, and secondary school was too expensive.

But in 2008, Candelaria, the Starfish mentor, helped Nicolasa persuade her parents to see the worthiness of the sacrifice in returning to school. Candelaria assured them of the benefits of the Starfish program and helped them form a vision for their daughter that would utilize her talents and skills. The parents finally relented, and reluctantly agreed to allow her to enroll in Starfish to continue her studies.

Since that critical moment, Nicolasa has wholeheartedly embraced the opportunity and taken flight. The obstacles are still enormous and the situation precarious- her family lost literally everything to flooding in May of 2010. But with each step, Nicolasa gains velocity towards her goal of making herself, her family and community proud of her as an educated and empowered woman.



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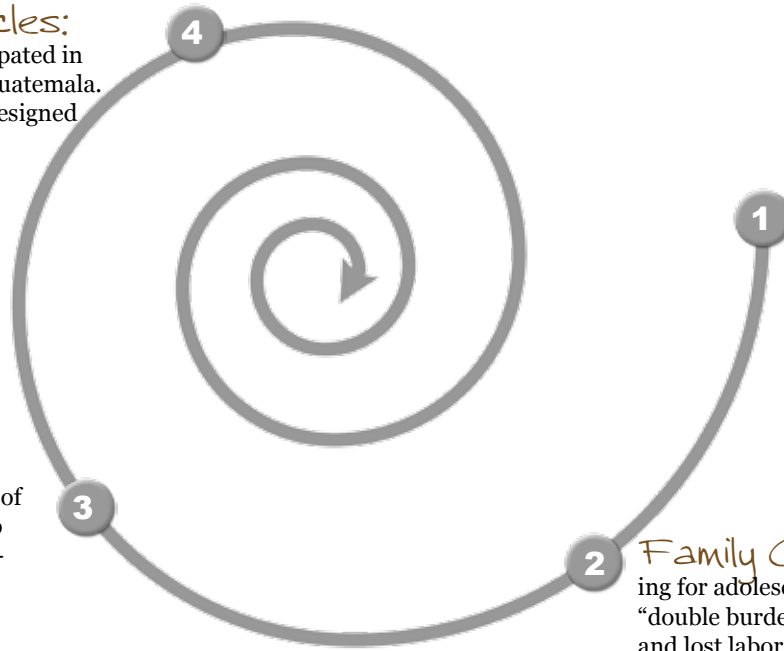
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HOW A GIRL'S TALENT AND POTENTIAL IS LOST

Structural Obstacles:

Mayan women have never participated in the decision-making process in Guatemala. The country's systems were not designed with her in mind.

Social Exclusion: Lack of schooling and opportunity lead to early marriage and frequent pregnancy.



Poverty: 3 in 4 indigenous families are in poverty or extreme poverty.

Family Challenges: Schooling for adolescent girls represent a “double burden” (increased school costs and lost labor time) to their families. Mothers of Starfish girls average less than 1 year of schooling.

Almost half of indigenous girls are married by age 18. 7 in 10 that lack an education are mothers by age 20. Only 5% of Mayan girls finish elementary school.

Overcoming Obstacles and Breaking through the Glass Ceiling

Age 12 often coincides with secondary school and puberty. In contrast to boys, this phase usually triggers the increased social isolation of young women in Guatemala as they are withdrawn from their social and academic spheres. Poverty often combines with traditional notions of “a girl’s place” and too often crushes any hope of a girl finding her unique voice and sharing her strengths. Instead, she is on a path of exclusion and early and frequent childbirth. Her potential and talents remain undiscovered.



HOW STARFISH UNLOCKS AND DEVELOPS HER TALENTS

Social Inclusion: Mentors find girls that have stopped their schooling at the 6th grade level. Each young woman is introduced into a positive-peer support group that nurtures that accompanies her through high school.

Cycle of Poverty Broken: Starfish scholarships get her through school. The Mentor ensures that she knows her rights, her body, her skills, her talents. She is the answer, and she knows it.

A Motivated Family: The Mentor is a girl's advocate, friend, teacher and sister and helps her family stay focused on the long-term goal and benefits that her education will bring.

3 She Uses the System: The Mentor helps a girl break down the barriers to the services, skills and systems that will help her thrive.

Girls with 7 years of education marry 4 years later and have 2.2 fewer children. • When 10% more girls go to school, a country's GDP increases on average by 3%. • A year of secondary education will raise her eventual wages up to 25%.



Meet Marilena, a Starfish Mentor

Starfish Mentor Marilena Choguaj knows a thing or two about perseverance and dedication. As the youngest of 8 children to a widowed mother, Marilena is familiar with the gauntlet of obstacles that girls in Guatemala face. After clawing her way through elementary school, Marilena had to stop her schooling for 5 years to help her mother. This time away only increased her resolve to get an education. Through the support key individuals and by working long days and studying at night and on weekends, Marilena has put herself through both high school and university.

“My dream is to see these girls become professionals with principles and values, and that they will struggle tirelessly to help their communities. In this way, they will help create the Guatemala that we envision.” -Marilena

2010: A year of achievement

- Expansion to 10 mentor-led, peer-support groups of 120 girls and 30 boys.
- Development of a systematized empowerment curriculum
- Hiring of Executive Director in Colorado and Country Director in Guatemala
- 97% of Students passed their grade and continuing on their education and empowerment path

2011 on the horizon: Systematizing success

- Pilot of the Bridge Program to ensure that young women continue to thrive beyond Starfish.
- Launch of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system
- 20% expansion of the mentorship program
- Development of a manual to facilitate the replication of the program

Starfish One by One would like to thank the following people for their belief in the power of an educated girl. One by One, we are unleashing the world's single most untapped resource: adolescent girls.

YOU make this possible!

Bjorn & Heather Aberg
Ashley Adams & Ryan M Skubic
Carolyn Alexander
Amgen Foundation Matching Gifts
C. Douglas & Jean Amidon
Tyler & Nicole Amidon
Elizabeth Andersen
Darryl & Joan Anderson Living Trust
J. Clifford & Mary Anderson
Keith L. Andreson
Antenucci Family
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Grant M. & Alexandra G. Besser
Bhakti Chai, LLC
Pat Bird
Paige Blackburn
Robyn Blatt
Betsy Bowie
Tupper & Karla Briggs
Amy McClellan Britton
Mary Buckley
Vittorio & Anam Cara Warren Bufacchi
Colleen C. Burgin
Robert & Kathleen Burgin
Alan J. & Maria Rosa Camp
Charles & Kathleen Cannon
Lisa Cargerman
Nancy Carlson
Brian & Amoree Casey
Dean & Jane Casperson
Kelly Casperson
Judith Chapman
Kesila Ryan Childers
Garrett & Katheryn Christnacht
Circle of Giving Incentive Fund
Lauren Clarke
Class, Donna
Janet Cochran
Malcom Collier
Todd & Susan Cone
Charlotte Cooke
Jay & Mary Beth Coonan
Karen Coriden
Leah M. Cotler
Sherwin Cotler, PhD
Stacy R. Cotler
Kathleen Cronan
Heidi Crum
Gregory J. Culligan & Courtney Monroe
Megan Cullen-Meyer
Mary A. Cunningham / Mary A. Coyle

Sakti & Maya Das
Jamini Vincent Davies
Rebecca Jane Davies
Catherine J. Davis
Loy Dickinson & Karol Shupe
Robert E. & Julie B. Donahue
Amber Donner
Stephen & Latitia Doppler
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H. Stephen & Kathy Ellis
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Evergreen Garden Inc.
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Ken and Karen Gerdes
Mark & Nancy Gershman
Khalid Ghayer & Laura Stark-Ghayer
Girl Scout Troop 1761
Girl Scout Troop 424
Michael & Mary Glode
Douglas Griffin
Don Griffiths
Angie Giustina
Derek & Lisa Graham
Green Mountain Coffee Roasters
Dale & Helen Griffin
Danya Gunnell
Christopher & Katherine Hahn
Holly S. Hall-Perry
Felicity Hannay and James Wood
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Microsoft Matching Gifts Program
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