



Organizational Overview 2010

Formally launched as a US non-profit incorporated in Colorado in 2007, Starfish One-by-One was founded on the principle of providing a high-quality program on an individual basis so that they in turn can promote the profound changes needed to break generational cycles of poverty for many. Starfish One-by-One focuses on unlocking the potential and talent of Guatemala's most marginalized population: young Mayan women. Through a unique combination of a scholarship and mentoring, Starfish One-by-One ensures a young Mayan woman's sustained access and success in middle and high school. Starfish One-by-One creates capable young women who are empowered to change their family, community and country.

Starfish One-by-One currently operates in 3 distinct communities in Guatemala and serves over 150 adolescents.

The Need

Guatemala's brutal 36-year civil war ended in 1996. Over 200,000 people, mostly Mayans, were killed or were "disappeared". The war compounded the effects of centuries of exploitation and exclusion of Guatemala's indigenous population. Today, the marginalization of the entire Mayan sub-group is still evident. While indigenous Mayans make up over 40% of Guatemala's population of 13 million, they are disproportionately poor: 75% live in poverty and 27% live in extreme poverty.

Strong data supports the need to strengthen programs targeting Mayan girls' education in Guatemala. Clearly, the talents of this sub-group within the Mayan population are underutilized and underdeveloped. Mayan girls start school on average 1.2 years later than their peers. Only 5% of Mayan girls actually finish primary school and from there only 14% even have access to secondary school¹. The systematic neglect of Mayan girl's education is reflected in the data pertaining to their capacity to contribute to Guatemala's development. Mayan females present data that puts them on par with some of the more marginalized populations in the world: 70% are illiterate, maternal mortality is three times higher than the national average, 40% are married by age 18 and 7 in 10 of those lacking an education are mothers by age 20.²

Age 12 represents a critical age for an indigenous girl in Guatemala and is typically when her path diverges from her male counterpart. She frequently comes from family with no history of education; her social sphere begins to contract. Families become reluctant to let her continue studying due to the "double burden" (school cost and lost labor) as well as social pressures. The subsequent isolation is associated with low self-esteem, limited decision-making ability, an

¹ Hallman, Kelley K. "Breaking the cycle of extreme poverty in Guatemala: Reaching up, Not trickling down." April 2, 2009. www.undp.org.gt/.../noticia/Hallman%20Population%20Council%20.ppt (accessed 2/6/2010).

² Ibid.

absence of growth opportunities, and early sexual initiation. She is highly likely to marry, reproduce early and often, and therefore replicate the chronic cycles of poverty in her own family and community.

Fortunately, the data surrounding the impact of girl's education demonstrates its capacity to transform families and communities. Data related to global efforts to education girls is extremely encouraging. A girl in the developing world with 7 or more years of education marries 4 years later and has 2.2 fewer children. Each year of secondary school boosts her future wages by 15-25%. Additionally, she invests 90% of her earnings back into her family (versus only 30-40% for a man).³ Clearly, excluded Mayan girls in Guatemala have a great capacity to become powerful agents of change.

The Starfish One-by-One Strategy:

The founding members of Starfish One-by-One have a combined 75 years experience working in the developing world, specifically in the area of women and poverty. Based on this knowledge, Starfish One-by-One recognizes that the financial hurdle is only one of several daunting impediments that keep girls from continuing their education and development.

In addition to the "Double Burden" (school expenses and income lost due to her studying instead of working), girls also face other equally powerful challenges:

- **Family pressure:** Families in poverty tend to view the education of females as a wasted investment because she usually marries young, leaves the family home and therefore incapable of supporting them.
- **Social Pressure:** Mayan girls rarely go beyond primary school, and each that does confronts powerful social pressures to do what her neighborhood peers are doing: quitting school, marrying, starting families.
- **Negative Self-Image:** As Guatemala's most marginalized group, Mayan girls rarely have their talents identified and developed. On the contrary, many lack the basic elements of healthy self-esteem. This impedes communication skills, decision-making ability, and the development of leadership skills.

To overcome this toxic combination, Starfish One-by-One employs a unique, systematized three-step approach geared towards unlocking Mayan girls' potential so that she can be an agent of change.

1. *Access to education:* partial academic scholarships to help overcome the otherwise impossible costs for schooling.

³ Levine, Ruth. "Girls Count, A Global Investment and Action Agenda." 2009.<http://www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/15154> (accessed 1 March 2010).

2. *A belief in herself*: Mentor and peer support on a weekly basis through the duration of her middle and high school studies. Mentor's are university-level role models who have overcome the same obstacles that the girl faces. Each mentor carefully selects 15 scholars and forms a group that will meet weekly for the duration of secondary and high school. Through modeling and the application of a strengths-based focus, the mentor constructs a positive and trusting relationship and space for each child. The mentor is the girl's advocate, big sister, and teacher who walks her through a systematized curriculum that equips her with the critical information she will need to be a woman who changes the landscape of her community. In addition to homework support, the curriculum includes: personal finance and small business skills, reproductive and health education, critical thinking and leadership, social responsibility, environmentalism stewardship, and IT and computer knowledge.

For the ongoing development of this curriculum, Starfish One-by-One collaborates with other experienced NGOs working in Guatemala. These NGOs provide Starfish One-by-One with their expertise and tested methodology to their specific focus areas, which is then reproduced in the mentor sessions. The result is a dynamic methodology of the upmost quality. Current partner organizations include: *Save the Children USA* (personal finance/small business), *Casa Sito* (critical thinking and debate), *Friendship Bridge* (parental support for academic success), *JUCONI Foundation Mexico* (Life Planning, Self-Esteem and Empathy training), and *WINGS* (Reproductive Education).

3. *A Bridge to the Future*: As our young women begin to break cultural and generation barriers and create a firm belief in themselves they also develop a view of the future and a goal to be realized. At this critical juncture Starfish One-by-One provides the support of an entrepreneurial guide who begins to break open the world beyond the program. This guide serves as a compass for each young woman to ensure that she acquires real-world knowledge of business and other professional areas, has access to university and acquires hands on, practical experience in her interest areas. This guide is singularly focused on ensuring that each young woman applies her unique talents for the betterment of herself, her family and her community.

This approach works. Since its launch in 2007, **over 95% of the 150 participants have continued in the program and successfully passed their academic years.** Most of the young women are already the most educated women in their community.

What is the Starfish One-by-One Growth Plan?

The Starfish One-by-One vision is to create a model that can be adjusted and replicated by other organizations in other contexts where girls are excluded from being a part of the solution.

Starfish One-by-One will continue will continue to maintain a focus on quality over quantity through providing high quality, personalized services to a few so that they may impact the lives of many. Over the next 5 years, we plan on adding approximately 4 groups of 15 girls each year to reach a maximum of 450 beneficiaries.

Starfish One-by-One has yet to find a similar program operating in Guatemala or Latin America. While there are numerous scholarship programs, none offer the personalized accompaniment of a mentor that specifically targets the critical, albeit non-financial, issues that

girls face. Similarly, Starfish One-by-One is unique in its ambition to empower girls to stay in their communities and promote community development.

How much does it cost?

The 2010 budget in Guatemala is \$140,000 USD, or roughly \$930 per child for the scholarship and the personalized mentor support. Based on Starfish One-by-One's belief in structuring an organization for the future, specialized staff have been hired to create an organization that can grow while maintaining high-quality standards. These costs will likely remain largely unchanged even as beneficiaries are added in future years.

When Starfish One-by-One has reached its maximum of 450 beneficiaries, the anticipated budget is \$430,000 per year.

Starfish One-by-One maintains an office in Colorado. Fortunately, 100% of the Executive Director's salary is covered by an individual with a deep belief in the organization's vision. As a result, the costs for maintaining the US office is approximately \$25,000 which covers a part-time administrator in addition to general overhead costs.

Starfish One-by-One is already on very stable financial footing that has permitted the recent growth. Less than 15% of the fundraising income is grant-related and Starfish One-by-One has over 90 sponsors of individual young women that cover the school scholarship fees. The organization is actively seeking supporters to facilitate the 5 year growth plan.

Who is Starfish One-by-One?

The organization is comprised of 11 dedicated staff, 9 of which are in Guatemala. The Guatemalan team is composed of impressive individuals who have all confronted and overcome the same challenges that the beneficiaries now face. As such, the team plays a fundamental role not only in the implementation of the program, but also in its design.

The Starfish One-by-One Board consists of the Founders and Founding Board members of Friendship Bridge. Friendship Bridge is a micro-finance organization that has affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of rural people by investing in women entrepreneurs, first in Vietnam and now in rural Guatemala.

They are:

Constance Ning, MA- President

Mimi Schlumberger- Treasurer

Theodore Ning, MD- Vice President

Kathleen Burgin- Secretary

Additionally, Starfish One-by-One draws from a wealth of knowledge and support from its **Council of Advisors**, which is comprised of the following individuals:

Sherwin Cotler, PHD

Christine McClure, BSN

Jane Hanson-Ernstrom, BSN, MSN

Judy Sadler

Bob Burgin

The Executive Director, who is based in Colorado but spends over 25% of the year in Guatemala, is Travis Ning. Travis has a graduate degree in International Administration and

over 10 years of experience in the field of international development in Guatemala, Mexico, East Timor and Paraguay.

For more information, please visit us: www.starfishonebyone.org