



**FOOD FOR
THE HUNGRY**

XONCA, GUATEMALA

MID YEAR PROGRESS REPORT

Written by **Guatemala Staff in the Ixil Region**

Translated by **Ingrid Delgado**

Prepared by **FH Canada**



INTRODUCTION



Communities:

Acul (Nebaj): 1
Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II: 3
San Juan Cotzal: 8



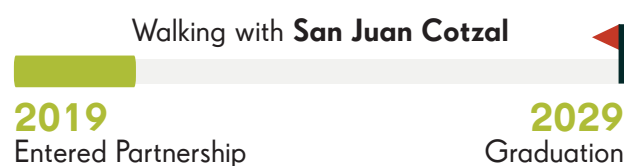
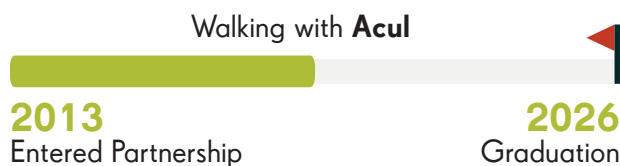
Families:

Acul (Nebaj): 684
Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II: 721
San Juan Cotzal: 2,447



Population:

Acul (Nebaj): 3,252
Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II: 3,496
San Juan Cotzal: 12,534



RE-EVALUATING GRADUATIONS
 Due to ongoing challenges from COVID-19, FH Guatemala is re-evaluating graduation timelines for partner communities that were due to graduate by 2023. An assessment this August of the impact of the pandemic on each community will determine their new, individual graduation dates.

Food for the Hungry (FH) walks with communities in the Nebaj and San Juan Cotzal Regions of Guatemala. With an emphasis on improving child nutrition, boosting community health, multiplying livelihood opportunities, and strengthening local leadership, your support empowers FH Canada’s work with 3,852 families on their daily journey out of poverty. In the Ixil region, FH continues the journey with Acul, Rio Azul, Xonca, and Villa Hortensia II. The eight new communities located in San Juan Cotzal are now in their second year of the journey.



“A highlight for me this year has been the effort and unity of our partner communities in the face of two major hurricanes plus a pandemic. When the hurricanes hit, they didn’t wait for the government to help them; they were proactive and cleared the roads so relief supplies could be delivered. This came at a time when families and communities were struggling through a pandemic. They continue to stand up, to organize, and refuse to break down.”

In the communities you find people with so much hope, even though they are aware of the real challenges they are facing. I have seen how the facilitators and volunteers work hand-in-hand to keep working through the challenges. This is truly resilience, and we are honored to walk with these communities.”

— Ingrid Delgado, Donor Accountability Coordinator, FH Guatemala

INTRODUCTION



COVID-19 UPDATE

The COVID-19 situation in the country has improved, however, many who lost their jobs did not get them back. Gatherings are still restricted to 30 percent of normal capacity and masks are required. Vaccines have started to roll out, but slowly. Thank God that cases have been minimal and community leaders have been equipped to handle the situation!

“Over the past year and a half, I have been blown away by the dedication, creativity, and patience of the FH Guatemala team. They have adapted to a very challenging situation by creating new channels of communication and incorporating new strategies. They endured the stress of disconnection, rolled out new systems, and continued to be a source of support for partner communities. Time and again, they leaned on God and each other for strength and grace. We are so blessed to partner with this incredible team!”

— Patty-Leigh Thielmann, VP of International Programs, FH Canada

PARTNERSHIP UPDATE: LOS ANGELES

For partnerships to succeed, it's critical that both parties (FH and the community) are all in. Although initially enthusiastic to work with FH, it became clear after much interaction that Los Angeles—a new San Juan Cotzal community—wasn't 100% sure they wanted to start their development journey. As we part ways, we wish them all the best!

*Contact partnerships@fhcanada.org to learn more about the FH partnership process.



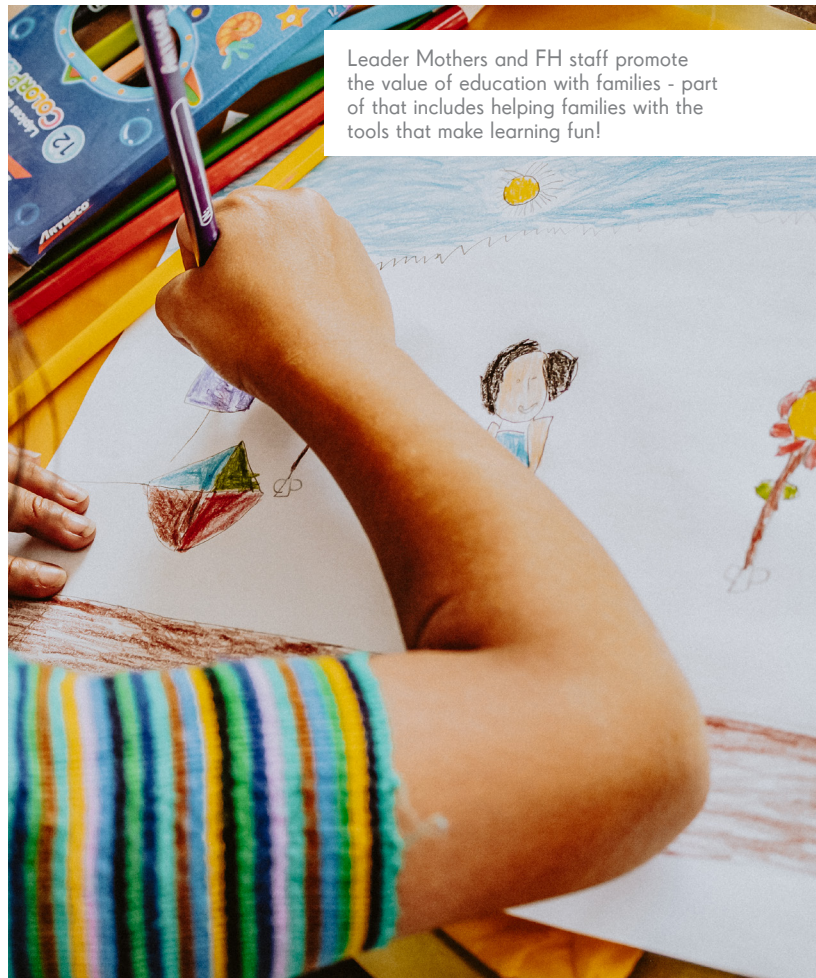
COMMUNITY GOAL

To improve the academic development opportunities of children, adolescents and youth.

During COVID-19 lockdowns, schools in Guatemala closed. Children were expected to learn at home, which presented huge challenges not only for the learners, but also for the parents. Not all parents have had a formal education themselves, so it can be difficult to help the older children. In addition, they are busy surviving the pressures of the pandemic and struggle to visit the schools twice a month to drop-off and pick-up their children's school work. When schools reopened briefly from March to the end of April this year, some students returned, some started going a few days a week, and others simply stayed home.

To help families cope with these unprecedented expectations, FH provided "game bags" to elementary school-aged children who did not return to school. These bags included creative learning tools like memory games, tangrams (wooden, geometric puzzle), and blocks to help motivate young children to continue learning at home. FH supported middle school students by regularly phoning them to find out how they were getting along with their schoolwork, listen to their struggles, and encourage them to stay engaged.

Remote learning poses risks to children whose families struggle with poverty. Older children can be sent to work to help fill the financial gap created by COVID-19 economic pressures, while younger children can be kept busy at home with extra chores as their parents focus on how to feed the family. It is FH's hope that during these rolling lockdowns, efforts like the game bags and phone contact will encourage families to not give up on education and stay committed to sending their children back to school when in-person learning resumes.



ACTIVITIES

68 families of elementary-age students received visits and **learning game bags** from FH staff.

5 middle school students phoned and encouraged in their remote learning.



HEALTH

“During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically the quarantine and curfew, I had fears about COVID-19. I thought I would never see my loved ones again. I was very afraid because the news reported deaths from COVID-19 in all parts of the world. It was like living through the 1981 civil war, all over again. My family was affected and my children suffered psychologically. I am deeply thankful to God that now my children are well as things have almost returned to normal. And I thank FH for the mental health support they gave us with the text messages.”

—Silvia Villatoro Terraza, [Leader Mother](#)

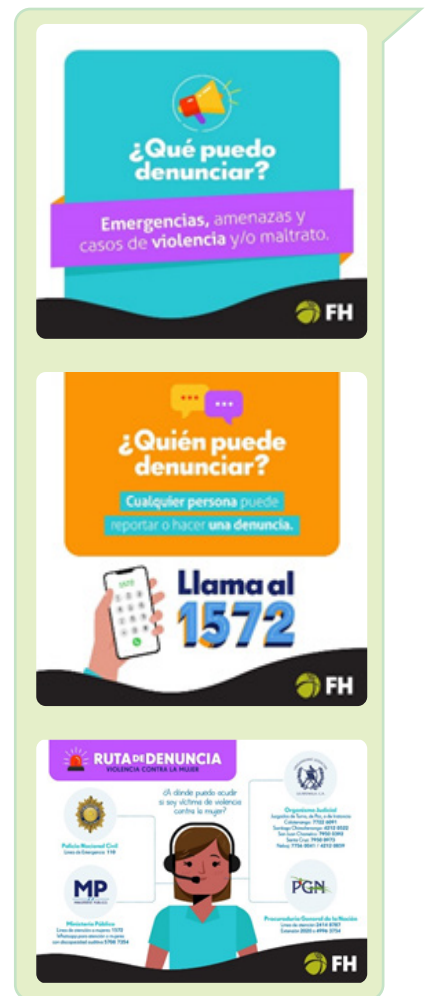
COMMUNITY GOAL

To improve the physical and mental health of families in partner communities affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

FH Guatemala partnered with the non-profit ChildFund to air COVID-19 prevention messages on two local radio stations in Cotzal and Nebaj. The messages were broadcast from December 2020 - March 2021 three times a day from Monday to Friday.

In addition to public awareness campaigns, FH equips Cascade health group leaders (Leader Mothers) and Growth Monitoring and Promotion teams to prevent the spread of the virus in their communities. In March, FH provided the leaders with hygiene kits and posters showing COVID-19 prevention hygiene practices (like handwashing). With these resources, Leader Mothers share critical health information with their neighbours through personal visits and chance encounters.

FH staff used phone messages to strengthen Leader Mothers’ capacity to teach on mental health topics. This teaching improves the wellbeing of community women physically, relationally, and intellectually. Obstacles to this method of communication included poor telephone signal and the reality that some Leader Mothers do not own smartphones. Thankfully, the leaders who did receive the messages shared them with those who did not, and the training went forward.





ACTIVITIES

17 different COVID-19 **prevention messages** recorded and broadcast on the radio in Cotzal and Nebaj; messages aired 3 times a day, 5 days a week, for a period of 4 months.

187 COVID-19 **prevention hygiene kits** and posters distributed to Leader Mothers (containing a sanitizing alcohol spray, antibacterial gel, a reusable mask, and two Ziploc bags).

317 phone calls, text messages, or in-person conversations initiated by FH staff on **mental health** strengthening.



Leader Mothers have been busy during this unprecedented time, sharing critical health messages and checking in on their neighbours.



LIVELIHOODS

"I have always liked to grow my own vegetables to support my family and take advantage of my resources, but I have not had sufficient finances to make my own garden. Now, thanks to FH, I can make my dream come true! Thank you for the seeds and compost."

—Maria Ixcoy

COMMUNITY GOAL

To (1) improve the food security of the most vulnerable families through home gardens and (2) improve the economic security of families through Savings and Loans groups.

Families across all communities continue to grow home gardens, including 220 new families in San Juan Cotzal! These gardens raise household food security by providing nutritious food for their children all year round. Community agricultural volunteers give technical support to gardening families and deliver FH-provided inputs like seeds. In February, health centre staff helped FH identify families with children under the age of five that have low weight or delayed growth. FH prioritized these families to receive fertilizer, seeds, and seedlings to grow beets, cilantro, carrots, nightshade vegetables, cabbage, onions, and more! The families are grateful for this support as they believe the future vegetables will improve their children's health.

FH staff phoned agricultural volunteers and gardening families to provide technical support as some had difficulty with insect plagues and flooding caused by the rainy season. They were encouraged to apply organic pesticides and dig ditches and furrows to improve crop drainage.

Each newly formed Savings and Loans group in Cotzal received a "Piggy-Bank" kit with a secure lockbox and personal savings books and leader training from FH. To help groups function safely during the pandemic, FH also provided face mask washing kits that include a large bucket, liquid soap, and personal towels. Members learned the value of following COVID-19 protocols so they can continue to move forward with their Savings group goals.

FH is working with Savings group members to turn their new business ideas into realities. The participants have been enthusiastically working through a four phase process to hone their plans and realize their dreams.



Members of the women's group, "The Platform" in the greenhouse where they produce seedlings for sale.

PITCHING A BUSINESS PLAN

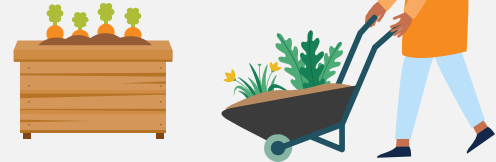
- 1** FH staff present Savings and Loans groups with the opportunity for members to pitch their business plans and receive free, expert consultation.
- 2** A group member presents their business idea to FH reps who provide feedback on how to improve the plan.
- 3** The revised business plans go to an FH committee that selects the best projects to move to Phase 4.
- 4** When the business plan is sharpened and completed, the entrepreneur launches their new venture and receives free consultation from FH reps for three months.



LIVELIHOODS

ACTIVITIES

450 family gardens cultivated! 270 of these gardens are brand new, including 220 in the new San Juan Cotzal communities.



17 agricultural volunteers each received a hoe as a special thanks.

4 business plans selected for incubation and support (one each in Acul, Rio Azul, Xonca, and Villa Hortensia II).



20 Savings and Loans groups active - 10 continuing and 10 brand new!

NEW! SOCIAL VENTURE PROJECT: BETTER COFFEE, BETTER LIVES



FH Canada will support a new Social Venture Project called **Better Coffee, Better Lives** to empower smallholder coffee farmers to improve their income, quality of coffee production, and food security. FH Guatemala recently surveyed coffee growers in partner communities and discovered their farms are only producing 35 percent of the expected yield. Through technical training and support, Better Coffee, Better Lives will equip coffee farmers to increase the quantity of coffee they grow, improve the quality of their beans, and withstand climate shocks. With these changes, smallholder coffee farmers will grow sustainable livelihoods.



LEADERSHIP

“Thank God, in the community [of Rio Azul] there is no positive case of COVID-19. We continue to comply with the measures established by the government such as the proper use of the mask, application of gel [hand sanitizer], physical distancing, and proper handwashing.”

—Don Miguel, Community Leader in Rio Azul

COMMUNITY GOAL

To (1) strengthen community resilience by reducing the risk of contagion of COVID-19 and (2) reduce domestic violence.

FH has continued to stay in close contact with community leaders. Through regular phone calls, FH staff have kept their finger on the pulse of community life. They’ve been encouraged that families are staying healthy, community meetings are going forward, and churches are holding in-person services while complying with COVID-19 safety protocols.

FH equipped community and church leaders, Leader Mothers, and Growth Monitoring and Promotion teams by regularly texting messages and resources on leadership and health. Phone calls were made to those leaders who do not own smartphones and/or do not read so they could also benefit from the information FH provided. In other cases, staff sent WhatsApp voice notes to keep leaders up-to-date on the latest pandemic information.

Whenever a community hears of new cases of COVID-19, local leaders double down on their efforts to emphasize wearing masks, frequent handwashing, physical distancing, and alcohol sanitizers to stop the spread of the virus.

FH shared key messages with community and church leaders to clarify the process for reporting incidents of domestic violence, which have been on the rise since COVID-19 began. The leaders in each of the communities shared these messages with community families. Together, they all now know who to go to and how to report incidents. The leaders expressed gratitude for the messages as they are ready to put this life-changing process into practice.

ACTIVITIES

72 check-ins conducted with community leaders.

72 text messages on reducing domestic violence sent to community leaders.



GROWING IN COMPASSIONATE LEADERSHIP

Xonca

"I thank FH for supporting my community, for the ideas they have shared with mothers, families, children, and young students and for the training developed with the leaders. They have been a great blessing for [the families] now they are putting into practice what they have learned."

— José

José López Gallego, is father to four adult children and a member of the Health Committee in Xonca and a volunteer on the Monitoring and Growth Promotion Team. These FH initiatives help fight malnutrition in his community.

José lives in a typical Xonca house with a metal sheet roof and wooden walls. They have electricity and their own latrine, which helps with sanitation and a healthy lifestyle. As a farmer, José grows corn and beans for his family but also herbs and flowers which he sells in the market in Nebaj. In addition to farming, he raises cattle, operates a local corn mill, and runs a small pharmacy in his community. His wife, Maria, helps serve customers in the pharmacy and the mill. Through these ventures, they both serve their neighbours and generate daily income for their family.

For the past five years, José has participated in FH workshops that equip him to be a health volunteer focused on supporting the growth of children in his community. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit Guatemala, he assisted in monthly sessions to measure the growth rate (height and weight) of children under the age of five. As he worked with children susceptible to malnutrition,





his compassion grew. Their vulnerability moves him to action and he encourages parents to follow the advice of the FH health workers.

“I feel motivated by the work that FH carries out in my community,” José shares. “The staff has been very empathetic with me and others to better facilitate learning about development topics. This has contributed to our participation. Now I am an ally motivating people in my community to learn.”

José has become an exemplary leader in promoting behaviour change in the homes of his community. “I want the mothers in my community to have the knowledge they need to care for their children; I want them to understand the importance of monitoring the weight and height of their children. This is the only way to identify if they are in good

health, and if not, they are advised to change their behaviour. I hope my leadership will inspire others in my community to also promote behaviour change.”

Due to pandemic restrictions, José’s community has temporarily suspended in-person monitoring sessions, however, he continues to support the Ministry of Health and FH staff in whatever ways they need.

“I thank FH for supporting my community, for the ideas they have shared with mothers, families, children, and young students and for the training developed with the leaders. They have been a great blessing for [the families] now they are putting into practice what they have learned.”

Thank You

FH Canada, FH Guatemala, and the families of Acul, Rio Azul, Xonca, Villa Hortensia II, and San Juan Cotzal thank you for your continued support of their unique development journeys! Your gifts are helping children learn, growing nutritious family gardens, empowering entrepreneurs, and equipping leaders to transform their communities.