

Trip Report - Jan 2014

Jan 25-Feb 15 Anne Ruch

Jan 25 - Feb 2 - Randy Ruch, Russell Ruch, Moira Cassidy

Feb 6- Feb 15 - Archetta Smith

Feb 2 - Feb 2 Jim Skon and 4 students from MVNU -

General conditions in the region

The unusual weather has made for lots of flooding. At least half of the perimeter of Flores is under water. This is bad for local businesses and of course, we can't run all the way around the island!

If you didn't go out to the rural areas, you would think that things are improving dramatically. The area of Santa Elena across the bridge has more stores and things seem cleaner. In the villages, things seem much the same.

Accommodations

While Randy, Russ and Moira were here, we stayed at Casa Amelia - much the same as always. Nice to get to walk around Flores a bit, but negatives always include having to wait for food, wait for Ismael to get there in the morning and the drive back and forth. Also much more expensive.

Chetti and I shared a room at Ismael's. As always, they are incredibly hospitable and kind. They have a girl (Candy) who lives there (not sure if she lives there all the time). She does all the dishes, washes clothes, cleans up in general. Having her there makes it a lot easier.

I paid for most of the food which we bought early in the week and we paid \$20 each per day to stay there.

Chetti and I went running many mornings on the road toward Santa Elena. We felt safe and if you go early enough, there are few cars - it was really pleasant to watch the sun come up!

Programs

Surely one of the highlights of the trip was having Randy, Russ and Ismael put in the cement floors in the 2 homes (see my blog for pictures and description). The bunk beds they made were also a huge success. While I'm sure they had sore backs, they seemed to get as much joy out of doing it as the families had in receiving them! I think we all agreed that this would be an excellent program to continue when groups come. Although some of the work requires experience, some is just labor that could be taught as they go. It would be reasonable to ask trip participants to pay for the materials so this wouldn't cost SewHope anything and people would get a great experience working first hand with families. It could be combined with putting in the stoves.

Randy had some new ideas about the stoves which he will discuss at next Board meeting.

Medical

The majority of the patients were Ob/Gyn although there were a few others. I saw one woman with what I think is a huge (about 7-8cm) "Buruli" ulcer on her foot that has been there for 27 years. I sent a photo to Dr. Gottwald at UTMC and she agreed. I took a biopsy and we'll see. Good news is that if that is what it is, then it can be treated with Rifampin and Streptomycin - what a blessing that would be for her!

I also followed up with some patients with diabetes. It doesn't seem that Carmen is doing a great job keeping Coral informed of abnormalities and she isn't keeping a clear list of results nor is she giving them to the patients. But Carmen really tries hard and is very kind - I think it wouldn't take much to fix this. We diagnosed many, many more with diabetes. I spent a fair amount of time talking to them about diet and honestly, I think the biggest culprit is the tortillas. I told one woman that she should limit tortillas to 2-3 a day. She started laughing hysterically and told me that she already had eaten 11 (it was 9AM)!!

Of course, without insulin, we are clearly limited but I really do think that with some adjustments in the glyburide and metformin and changes in diet and maybe some walking, major improvements could be made. While I know that we have always debated about whether to address chronic illnesses, it seems that diabetes is so very, very common and so devastating to their health that it is worth increasing our effort.

The doctors there prescribe the meds where the metformin and glyburide are combined in one pill which of course dramatically increases the cost so they are incredibly grateful for us selling them at a greatly reduced cost. I think that the majority would be willing to pay about what we seem to be able to get them for wholesale. We can talk about this at next med committee meeting.

Hypertension is another issue - the people don't seem to be consistent in taking the meds. I think that they equate having a headache with having HTN so if they get a headache, then they think the meds aren't working and they quit taking them. Also, I don't think that Carmen has been following up with Coral about adjustments that could be made with the doses - again this could be an easy fix with more education.

Lots of the usual aches and pains and "infecciones de urinaria" and lots of people looking for vitamins - I did my best to assure people they don't need the vitamins and that the general aches are par for the course of living there and of living past 40!!

In addition to our own clinic, we had jornadas in:

La Libertad - Centro de Salud - now they are actually sending us their abnormalities for treatment!

San Francisco - a government clinic which is unusually clean, organized and very well run. Their nurse did paps with me and all the staff were exceptionally interested in learning. One of the nurses (Loidi) has an interest in becoming a cytotech

Sayaxche - at Anita's clinic - we had many people who came for treatment who had been referred from the government clinic in Sayaxche

Chal - at the Catholic Church/Center there. I was somewhat surprised to see that this Catholic Center is VERY fancy and has obviously had a LOT of money put into it. The after school education center that they have there has many rooms (they only have 6 students). The walls are made of an expensive type of stone; the ceiling is a fancy type of wood. They also have a clinic there and a very well equipped pharmacy. The clinic is run by health promoters and they do prenatal care there. The woman who runs the place is on the Board for our "Casa Materna" - seems odd that she never mentioned that they have this clinic there in Chal.

Cervical Cancer Prevention

Paps - 396

ASCUS - 3

LGSIL - 7

HGSIL/Carcinoma-In-Situ - 14

Invasive Cancer - 3

Colposcopy - biopsy - 30

Cryotherapy - 14 (several returned who had previously had abnormal)

Leep Conizations - 9

We had some issues with Carmen not making a huge effort to contact all the patients with abnormal from past jornadas. I didn't realize it until midway through the trip but then we reached almost all of them. Carmen had called them all at least a couple of times but she never told me or Orfe that she couldn't reach some. Once we realized it, we either found other phone numbers or contacted other people in their villages. While it seemed like a clear lack of being responsible, I think she is young, this is her first job and she doesn't always realize the importance of things. We talked about it a lot and I believe she will do a much better job in the future. She really made a great effort to contact everyone on this trip once we had their results and to put them in the EMR.

One woman had moved to Mexico and even drove all the way from there to get a LEEP done!! A few women had to leave their homes at 4 or 5 in the morning to come for treatment and some drove home on a moto after a LEEP!!! But no one seemed to mind! They said they would drive the moto slowly!!!

Since Chetti was here, we had all the results done by the end of the trip and everyone had been notified and treated when needed.

Orfe had gone to great lengths to look for possible women who might be potential cytotechs for us in the future. 2 came the first day and we talked in detail with them about what we were looking for:

1. This was going to be a long term commitment
2. They would have to work with Chetti every day while we were there.
3. They would not be paid because they were essentially "students".
4. Our goal was to start training now, have them work with our cytotechs while we were there

5. If it looked like it was working, we would look into sending them to cytotech school in Guatemala City.
6. We didn't talk about coming to the U.S. because we didn't want that to be the motivation for doing this - however, that is the plan (after attending cytotech school in Guatemala)

One of the girls didn't come back the next day, but the other (Mayra) proved to be OUTSTANDING!! She worked very hard throughout the trip. She quickly learned how to do all the staining; really started to understand the concepts; asked very intelligent questions; showed initiative. She was kind and enthusiastic and she and Chetti clearly became good friends by the end of the trip - they both cried when we left!!!

I have already contacted the Director of the cytotech school in Guatemala City and am awaiting a response. She may be ready to start right away. She has friends in Guatemala City that she can stay with so cost should be reasonable.

There was also a nurse (Loidy) in the clinic in San Francisco who told us how much she wants to become a cytotech - this was before she even knew we were looking for someone. Apparently, the government will pay for nurses to go - however, it is very selective (probably in a political way) and she has been trying to go for a couple of years. When they send someone, they pay their way but then the person has to work for them. This woman is only 2 years away from "retiring" from the system (although she is only 37!!) so I doubt she would be willing to quit her position in the government system at this point. However, she was incredibly interested so we haven't given up! Loidy has been trained in and does VIAA. We had a very interesting conversation which I'll tell you about at the next meeting. Ultimately, one of the nurses there had a negative VIAA but fortunately had a pap which showed CIS and she ended up having a hysterectomy which saved her life - so needless to say, they all think that VIAA is useless.

Maternal Health

We visited the Casa Materna. Now there is a fence around it with a lock - Carlos has the key. He came out and gave us the key but barely said hello to me - kind of strange. Ismael is frustrated that the people aren't helping enough. He said he spent almost all of his time in December and most of January there working. When the community works with him, he said that then the community brings food and helps but when he is alone (most of the time), they are not friendly to him. He has repeatedly asked that they at least clean the floors up but they won't. However, they did put in the septic system.

I talked to Coral during the trip and we agreed that Ismael should only do the things that the community is not capable of doing and that they should be working with him whenever possible. I told him this but he's worried that they won't do things correctly - like not install the showers or toilets correctly.

He seems concerned about what SewHope's role will be when it is all done. There are still documents that need to be made up and approved by an attorney - I told him to work more with Coral on this.

When I was at the clinic at the Catholic Church, several patients told me how excited they were that the Casa Materna was being constructed and so I really think that in the end, it is all going to work out - I think the community will demand it!

I saw about 25 pregnant patients - most got ultrasounds and were happy to pay the 20Q for one. I really didn't find anything too out of the ordinary - just changed some due dates. One issue is that the women of child-bearing age are not receiving folic acid daily. Dr. Lucky Hernandez said this is a mandate from the government and that all clinics are required to distribute it to all women daily. Again, I think this would be a good area for us to explore more and see if we can work with the govt system to improve.

Nutrition

Hanssel has done an outstanding job getting the hortilizas going. He has started 27 in Purushila and quite a few in Mango (not sure of the number). I spent a couple of hours touring them with him and we made some videos. The families are SO very happy and they talked at length about what a blessing Hanssel has been for them. In the videos, they talked about why they didn't do this before, how the gardens are going to help their families and what their goals are for the future. It was truly inspiring!

Lucky Hernandez talked with me again about the Nutributter program - she gave me the contact info for the woman in charge in Guatemala - it is probably a good alternative to KAH for emergency situations and perhaps as a supplement for exceptionally poor families and maybe in the schools. We can discuss.

We brought the food dehydrator and tried it out a few times at Orfe's house. Personally, I thought it was fantastic but while Orfe said she liked it, she didn't eat the dried fruit and seemed to ignore it. We talked to the families about it with Hanssel and they seemed very interested. Hanssel thought that it is just something they are not accustomed to but that it could be a great asset to the program.

Education

A long story!!! Before the trip, our committee had really spent hours preparing for pre-testing, ideas for teaching, ideas for using the computers, etc.

Purushila

In a nutshell, the teachers were supposedly on strike because they cared so much about the children and they wanted more salary and more money for nutrition and more money for books, etc. While this all sounds great, the reality appeared to be that it was just one more excuse to miss school. Ismael says they do this all the time - usually they just take a couple of days a month to "strike" and then return. AND....only some of the schools participated in this strike - seems like there was a choice about whether or not to and there were definitely not going to be any big

repercussions if the school opened. So on February 13th, they finally opened instead of Jan 10th.

So, of course, you can imagine how I felt when I got here with Moira and there were no classes in Purushila. The kindergarten classes were continuing because those those teachers actually care! Initially we did our best with the children in the after-school program and then on Tuesday, they agreed to have the fourth grade class open so we could work with and test those children. On Wednesday morning (of that first week), we had a big meeting with all the teachers but the Director chose not to come (supposedly he had a "directors meeting" which they seem to have every ten minutes or so!!). I told them that the #1 requirement we had for their participation in our computer program was that the teachers come to school every day. They all know that it is the norm to miss school constantly and I told them that we can not work together if that is the case. So, I asked if they could open the school for Thursday and Friday since Moira was there. I explained the great lengths and expense that she went to to come to Guatemala. So, they all agreed and seemed VERY anxious to make sure they would still get the computers.

So....Thursday we got there and all the children were there - not sure how that communication got out so easily but it did. Moira and I went to different classes and it was GREAT. Clearly, the children know almost nothing but their enthusiasm was incredible. I showed them the videos from Roxanne's class (4th grade - Washington Local) and they were mesmerized. They all sent back a video of themselves and wrote little letters to the students so we could start a penpal program. We tested them for the math tests and started doing a reading test that Moira brought that was phenomenal. I'll show it to you at the next meeting. Moira also brought other tests for a general assessment of the children's level, which were great and we planned on doing them on Friday.

A couple of the teachers actually were quite good and I was impressed with ways they were teaching math - although it was obvious this was a show for us - but at least I could see that they COULD teach (this was only 2 of the teachers).

Then.....completely out of the blue.....at the end of the morning, the Director walks into each of the classrooms and announces "Attention!! Attention!! Tomorrow (Friday) at 7:30 AM sharp there will a bus here to bring us to the beach for a field trip!! The teachers will all be going and the 4th, 5th and 6th graders can participate if they can pay 10Q and pack a lunch (pretty much impossible for any child). I was in shock and assumed that my understanding of the Spanish had to be wrong! But Edwin was with me and when I asked him, he indeed said that this was correct. So....no school on Friday. I was infuriated! The Director himself never even said hello to me. Several of the teachers, however, had been wonderful and had been very kind.

We told the teachers that if we could not even see the children on Friday and continue our evaluations, then we could not continue the program there but I don't think they had any control.

Fast forward to this past Friday.....we heard nothing until the Director called Ismael out of the blue to say that now the strike is over; they are back at school; and they would like to get the computers and start the program again!

On another note, Moira found on some of the computers that the teachers had been doing a lot of "facebook" and making "selfies" (I'm so out of it that I didn't know that that is when you take photos of yourself). So, it seemed that they were bringing the computers home for their own use.

Edvin is another story - he is also a big loss....but I'll leave that story for when I get home.

HOWEVER, the trip was fantastic in many ways on the education side. Thanks to Ismael and Orfe, all the children were tested in the after-school program and we ended up with a lot of tests from Purushila. We also have gained tremendous support from the parents, families and children. I feel I have a much better handle on where we are starting from. Also, Jim Skon and his students really fixed up the computers so all the useless videos are off them and now, just good educational programs are on there. Also, the internet functions well for at least 20 computers in the clinic.

I wrote to the people on the education committee while I was there and they agreed that we should back out of Purushila at this time. We could always revisit it at a later time but we have much to learn and with our limited resources, the best course might be to hire 2 part time teachers in the after school program and just work there for this year. Hopefully, by next January, we'll have the new building and we can expand. I'm attaching a letter that I would like to send to the Director at Purushila. In reality, we gave them lots of time to prepare for our visit and we surely ASKED if we could come first. We had asked for almost nothing but the ability to work with your children for a week and assess them

Edvin Maldonado - definitely a disappointment. While I feel somewhat stupid for hiring him to begin with, it is really hard to find a good person. Ismael, Orfe and I talked a lot about whom we should "hire" in general. Ismael pointed out that although Edvin won that big award, awards are often given for political connections. Apparently, they talked with several good teachers that they know and they were all surprised that we had hired Edvin - he has a reputation for being lazy and basically not a good teacher.

Moira had come exceptionally prepared with all kinds of testing materials and great ideas for the teachers. She was clearly frustrated with Edvin from the start (it didn't help that he started flirting with her the first day!). He couldn't seem to follow the simplest tasks - like how to administer a reading test (an excellent one used often in schools in the U.S. - Moira had found it in Spanish).

I gave him the benefit of the doubt and gave him a week to have the students in the the after-school program complete the math tests (add, subtract, multiply, divide). Each test took 5 minutes. I also gave him specific instructions to provide us with sample lesson plans for the month. Both Moira and Ismael were there when we spoke so it wasn't a question of not understanding my Spanish. At the end, he did none of it and was filled with a million stupid excuses. He honestly doesn't seem to know how to teach children how to read nor how to learn basic arithmetic.

He also prepared all the soil for a garden over a month ago but has yet to plant any seeds!

Ismael is fed up with him and really wants to let him go - I emailed our edu committee and all were in agreement. We have been paying him 3800 Q per month and Ismael and Orfe think we could find 2 part time teachers that would make Q2000 per month each and work every afternoon from 1-5 in the clinic. We'll discuss this at next Board meeting. Ismael asked me to write him a letter explaining why we no longer want to work with him. I am also attaching a preliminary letter for Ismael to give him.

In preparation for the new "Guatemala Board of Directors" coming, we spent about 6 hours one evening organizing the clinic - nothing like having visitors coming to clean up your house!!!

One great thing that came out of it was that Moira had organized all the books (there are about 400-500) by grade level and we moved them into the front room so that they can be more like a library. Orfe is very excited about it and we already tried it out. Some children took some books with the understanding they would return them in a couple of days and they all did.

Ismael, Orfe and I ended up doing all the evaluations of the students. The tests that Moria brought were outstanding! We can talk about the results - they are even worse than I had imagined. Even the 5th graders can barely subtract, much less multiply. I think that focusing on these basics is a great goal for this year.

General evaluations of our program

Lucky, Tita and Isabel really emphasized that we need to have a way to quickly assess the status of the people we are serving so we can demonstrate improvement. I know we have all talked about this a lot and the "Progress Out of Poverty" program set up by the Grameen Bank seems like a good system. The thing that has held us back was a lack of someone to get the training and do the surveys. Lucky said she will work on this - you can be trained in Guatemala City. She said she would do it and maybe Orfe also. We'll make this a priority in the next couple of months.

Meeting of new Board of Directors:

I'll send you all the power point presentation that Orfe and I did. Can't send it by email since it's too big a file - I'll see if I can put it on "google documents" or send it by Google drive.

The meeting went GREAT! They were all so interested and had great ideas for how they can be involved and also, how they can help us with fundraising.

Randy and Coral skyped. They were able to hear but it was impossible to get their input. We'll work on setting up a date for the meeting next year early enough that we can all be there to participate.

Rudy had team from the U.S so he didn't come. He said he would skype in but the night before said that he couldn't. For a lot of reasons, I'm not sure he is the best person on that Board. We can talk about it.

An engineer who works with Isabel 's company came to the meeting. He was really insightful, incredibly interested and philosophically and spiritually in line with our goals and vision. Perhaps he would be one to ask to join the Board.

Jim Skon and group from MVNU

Jim and 4 students came for 3 days. They went through all the computers - all the memory had been filled on the hard drives because of the way Sr. Pam had put in the videos. They removed them and will easily replace whichever ones we want by just downloading them through youtube - takes up much less space.

20 computers weren't functioning for whatever reason and they fixed them all. They also numbered them all so now they are easier to keep track of.

They also went through the programs that were on there through "edubuntu" and eliminated any that weren't educational - like Pacman.

Then, they set up a "wi-fi" system in the clinic so now we can run about 20 computers with internet there at the same time.

They also contacted people they know through the Nazarene church who might like to work with us in the future on building and medical projects - people with alot of experience. Their visit was a huge success.

Trip to "Far Away Home"

Randy will talk about this more at the next Board meeting but we had a fantastic trip to Comolapa (near Chimeltenanga). They build schools out of recycled materials. I'll forward some pictures. It was incredible and inspiring. Ismael and Hanssel came to. It gave them tons of ideas. We're considering using some of the ideas for the additional buildings on our land - probably not for the clinic.

Community Center/Clinic Construction

Hanssel has completed putting in the fence made from the "clavel" plant! It still has to grow but apparently grows fast so that is fantastic!

I gave Fernando, the Engineer, the plans from Jonathan. He said he will do the engineering part free of charge. He is willing to have his construction company do the work. He will send 13 workers up to Peten to live there and he thinks he can get it done in 3 months! He has tons of experience and Isabel thinks highly of him. He said it's too hard to find reliable workers in Peten and this is probably the best way to go. He will be sending a proposal soon. He spent a long time at the land and asked a lot of great questions and had many new ideas. He thinks we should definitely include solar panels and a water filtration system. He hopes to start in early March.

I have already put him and Jonathan in touch so they will be working together. He loved the work Jonathan had done.

We did not get a chance to visit Daniel or Flori's children - we kept trying but the days flew and there was little time for sleep! I keep telling Orfe and Ismael to take

breaks but they are clearly passionate about all this and don't seem to care about the amount of work!

Ismael's garden - unbelievable!

500 fish in the fish farm

6-16 eggs per day

Too many chickens to count!

Plaintain trees flourishing

Avocados everywhere!

He was delighted to see fruit blossoming on some new trees he planted (he wasn't expecting fruit for a couple of more years!)

Peppers, cilantro, too many other veggies for me to remember!

Their new dog, Molly is "expecting!". We need to move into the area of pet contraception!!

Spirituality

Orfe continues to teach bible lessons to the after school children.

Marriage counseling sessions haven't started yet

Their church in FLores is growing - I attended service there.

OK...bastante! Sorry for the long letter but I just want to keep everyone up to date.