

## Trip Report

AND Thoughts from Brandon,

June 16-28 2014

Anne Ruch, Brandon Smith, Kathy Curry, Tim Kuhn, Mason Johnson, Ashley Shaffer

**Team** - Honestly, an exceptional group. Everyone went above and beyond. Lots of comradery. The 3 of us "left behind" were genuinely sad when Kathy, Ashley and Mason left a few days before us. We were a mixed group with different skills and personalities - somehow it seemed like the perfect mix. I think real friendships were forged.

We definitely had a few fallen warriors from illness but thanks to cipro, the illnesses were short-lived and maybe I learned a couple of things to try to prevent this in the future.

**Kathy** was loved as always - she has a true talent for bringing joy and lightheartedness to any situation. She quietly always looks out for everyone - making sure we're all well hydrated and happy. The kids as always took to her like their new best friend and she had lots of opportunities to read to them, teach them and to stamp her little piece of God's love on their hearts. Kathy told Brandon that she was hoping on the flight back that the stewardess spills water on her so that she can moved up to first class like she did last time - only Kathy!!!

I'm always reluctant to bring the "under-20" group on these trips for a bunch of reasons. Having **Mason** on this trip is totally making me rethink this. The hilarious interactions that he and Kathy always have soon spread to the rest of the group and his constant optimism and positive personality permeated the whole group. He was always anticipating how he could help and his level of compassion is far above most people his age. He had lots of opportunities to interact with the children in so many ways and I know he was a huge role model especially for the boys. He was also a huge part of the floor installation team! I hope he gets to use his ability to inspire youth and to use his God-given talent of putting people at ease in whatever occupation he choses for his life.

For a first year med student, **Brandon** surprised me with his level of knowledge and ability to take on tasks that students years ahead of him struggle to do. We joked that he might have had a few more "gynecology interactions" if he would just wear a wig but considering that the Guatemalan women are pretty shy around male medical people, he somehow put them at ease and by the end, he was running his own "pap clinic"! He took awesome histories, which made my job so much easier. His constant humility and compassion for EVERYONE was always shining through. When he wasn't able to go into many of the patient rooms at the beginning because of the male/female issue, he never complained and always found so many ways to do whatever was needed. For someone who is so clearly organized and intelligent, he is incredibly humble.

I didn't know **Tim** very well before the trip - just that he was an awesome keyboard player in our church and a "super nice person" who works as an engineer. Now I know that he can do just about anything and he does it in a behind-the-scenes humble kind of way. He basically would just observe the situation; figure out what needed to be done to fix it and just got it done. Yes, he was personally responsible for getting the water filtration systems set up. But lots more than that! For example, we found out that 15 of the computers that we have were damaged by power surges. Yes, we have a good surge protector but Tim figured out that the ground was insufficient (non-existent?). He was determined to fix it but when I found him 10 feet off the ground on a tall half-broken down ladder IN THE DARK (another Santa Ana power outage), working on the electricity, I realized that his level of commitment goes far beyond the usual. He didn't seem to mind that he got some minor "shocks" because the power was going in lines that it wasn't supposed to be (Don't you love the way I describe electrical circuits!!). I was pretty excited when I heard Tim talk several times about how he's going to bring a volt meter THE NEXT TIME HE COMES!!!

**Ashley** was ALWAYS sunshine for us all. When we asked everyone what their favorite part of the trip was, Mason said "meeting Ashley"!!!! They had some pretty tight sarcastic humor going the whole time!! Ashley's goal for the trip was to really get to know all the SewHope does so that she can help us with communicating our message and our work to the world. I think she achieved that goal far more than she had hoped. If it's any indication, her help and advice clearly contributed to us raising well over \$13,000 on this trip for the Santos family. Ashley was our little prayer warrior and worked hard to keep God in the center of all our work. She is such a great example of someone with an unshakable faith that is so contagious to all around her.

**Staff** - Wow! Sometimes I can't believe how we found this incredible team. Ismael and Orfe never stop - they inspired everyone in the group as always. They have boundless energy and such a sincere commitment to changing the lives of those most in need. WE really would be nothing without them. As always, I was shocked at what they continue to achieve. Their monthly reports are so inadequate in describing what they really do.

Hanssel seemed so proud to show us his work; I think having had him visit us in the U.S. was a great thing - it made us feel more like just close friends who were always there for each other. Thank you Lisa! He fell behind a bit at school and had to drop a couple of classes but overall, is doing really well. He is clearly loved in all the communities and his work is remarkable. He had to replant the "claves" plants that were burned at the clinic and the natural fence is now really taking off - I know he spent hours watering and caring for that. He couldn't wait to show us. I wish I had had more of a chance to visit the gardens - not sure if others on the team did??

**Carmen and Mayra** are fantastic. They seem to get along well and their jobs are kind of morphing into things where they can best use their skills. They both seem to

take their jobs very seriously and they really do ANYTHING we ask of them. Mayra is still planning on going to the cytotechnology school in Guatemala City in January. I taught her how to do the smears and she became pretty proficient pretty quickly. I watched her do about 10 of them and then she was able to do them herself. She only did them on lighter weight patients but did about 30.

BTW, her 8 year old son left for the United States to live with his aunt in Nebraska where he will go to school. He was apparently born in the U.S. He left one day while we were there. Yes, she was sad but mostly proud that she is giving him this opportunity. It is such a different world than I live in.

**Jessi and Franklin** were invaluable during the week. Sometimes Orfe just had them watching Anita so she could get her work done. But they helped with tons of translating at the clinics and as always, they will do anything you ask. They are going to work with the students in Purushila this summer with an after-school program somewhat similar to what we're doing at the clinic but without the internet.

**Community Center** - We spent quite a bit of time reviewing the engineering plans - Tita and Luckey had lots of great ideas. Orfe and Ismael had lots of good insights. Unfortunately, I didn't realize how early our flight out was on Saturday morning so there was no time to have a second meeting with the Guatemalan group on our way back but we met them when we arrived. Fito, the engineer, couldn't come to that meeting but I spoke with him and Tim is going to send him the changes. Tim has referred to it several times as "our" clinic - Woo Hoo!!!

Apparently, the word is getting around the community about what's happening and there is great excitement! The mayor donated a lot of "fill" for the low areas. We're thinking that the municipality might pay to fill in the area in the front so that buses can pull up there.

**Casa Materna** - I didn't get a chance to get out there although several in the group did. All the doors are in. I think it's pretty close to being ready to go. Sounds like there is tremendous support now from the committee and even from Carlos!

**Clinic** - Orfe had arranged for us to have a jornada at a different place almost every day. Although the packing up and tearing down were a bit of a pain, it really helped us see a lot of patients and to get the word out more about SewHope. We did over 400 pap smears and lots of colposcopies/biopsies and cryos. Jornadas were in:

1. Santa Ana Clinic
2. San Benito government hospital
3. Anita's place in Sayaxche
4. Government hospital in La Libertad (they even gave us 2 exam rooms!)
5. "Centro de Salud" in Paxcaman
6. A Christian "retreat" center (not far from San Benito) run by Pastors Nelson and Nancy. The place was quite pretty and peaceful - not ideal for a clinic but nice.

New **sterilizer** worked GREAT!!! It takes about 40 minutes to sterilize the instruments. Tim got it going and taught Carmen how to work it. She can do it by herself now.

I spent 2 days doing **ultrasounds and seeing prenatal** patients but honestly, I kept the ultrasound a secret after that. Once the word was out that we had one, they were banging down the doors and I just didn't have the time to do them along with seeing patients. I guess this is a good problem!

Fluoride treatments - many of them have gone bad probably because of the heat. We have at least one full box which is usable. We should get more and make sure that Carmen is documenting which children are getting them and when.

**Cervical Cancer Prevention** - Not sure if I'm imagining it but I feel like I'm starting to see an enormous change in the accountability of the government centers in the ways they are handling the paps. Several patients came to me with pathology reports and letters from the main cytology center in Guatemala City asking that we follow up with the patients on abnormals. Generally, the results were coming no more than 2 months after being done which was a huge change. The letters I was receiving were very accurate, professional and appropriate. They were addressed to the "Social Work Departments" in the "Centros de Salud" but in reality, the social workers are all calling Orfe to refer the patients to us. The patients seem to really know about our work and are incredibly appreciative for the opportunity to receive education and curative treatment.

I had asked Orfe to have about 70 patients specifically return and they all did. Every single one of them brought their papers with them that we had previously given them.

I think this is really exciting! In reality, there is already an existing infrastructure for paps in Guatemala. If it would just work as it is supposed to, that could be an enormous help. Maybe now that they know they are being watched (by Isabel's group, ourselves, Dr. Dean from INCAN, Eric Suba, Anita Chary,, etc), they are actually starting to do their jobs. This could be potentially a huge break-through.

**HIV/AIDS** This is clearly a growing problem. Also, as we know, women with AIDS are much more likely to develop cervical cancer so the "SIDA" program there wants to work with us on this. How tragic if the patient is cured from AIDS with their drugs but dies from cervical cancer. So, the SIDA program sent us many patients. Mayra got us some HIV tests and I think she actually ran a few. We need to discuss this at next medical committee meeting. Apparently, we can get the tests easily and cheaply. We should also really be testing all pregnant women if possible.

OK....now the funniest story. When we checked in at Flores (coming back), we checked our bags and had lots of time so we went to the little bodega there for some ice cream (wonder who's idea that was!). Next thing, one of the workers comes over to me to ask that I return to security because they ran our baggage through the

scanner and there was some concern about one of the bags (the one with the 450 paps in it!)

So I go in and a very tall and professional looking guy formally asks if he can examine the bag. He opens the zipper and pulls out the first bag of paps. Within seconds, 3 of the military guys with the "brown berets" and the guns that are bigger than them come literally running over. The inspector is holding the bag gingerly with thumb and index finger. I let him ponder the items for a minute and then I said "They are papanicolaous"!! The brown beret military guys started laughing. They all seemed completely confused. Next, 2 of the women supervisors come over and start looking at the requisition forms with each pap. They smile. One of the brown berets asks for my passport and starts writing down all my information. He wants to know about our organization and where we work. So I took on the tactic of becoming extremely enthusiastic about women's issues and prevention of cervical cancer death. I launched into my usual banter about how so many women in Guatemala are dying of this preventable disease (you could see the female supervisors nodding their heads) and then I gave the Brown Beret guy our SewHope card. He was going to give it back to me but I told him he should give it to his Novia or wife or whatever so she can receive screening! Then they told we could "pueden pasar". It was hilarious - one of my favorite Guatemala moments!!!

**"Maraton"** - I love how we call it a maraton when it is an 8K walk/run. Orfe has a committee of 8 that are working on details. The Guatemala group (Isabel, Luckey and Tita) are helping. I think I forwarded you all the list of things I asked them to help with. Also, Rudy wrote to Erick Barrondo. At best, it will be 10,000 women walking, running, holding hands and crying for those that died needlessly. There will plenty of water, snacks, shirts for all participants and great awards.

At worst, it will be 100 degrees, there will be no water or snacks or awards and a couple of hundred people will walk/ run and it will be the start of something bigger down the road.

I imagine reality will be somewhere in the middle (probably closer to the second scenario!)

WE made a new movie of Flori with this Christian Spanish song about wishing you could have someone back in your life that you lost. Every time I hear it, I spill tears on my computer!! WE showed it at one of the jornadas and everyone sobbed and within minutes, I had about 20 more "customers" for paps!!

**After-school education program** - Unbelievable!!! Really!!!! The kids are SOOO enthusiastic. They race to get their computers open. They are so proud of their successes. They all showed off to me how many "stars" they have on the programs. The library is also a huge success. Our team worked on straightening out the books and kids got the message that the shelves are to look like that every day. They seemed to take that seriously. The kids begged to take home a few books each night and they were good about returning them and getting more.

The one little girl who is at the head of the class is amazing. She is from the home where Randy, Russ and Ismael laid the floor and put in the bunkbeds. Her level of improvement is truly remarkable. She LOVES to read. They tend to pick out the

easier books so I gave her Charlotte's Web and wrote a little note in it to her. She was so excited and told me it would be "easy" for her to read. Then she ran off to a corner to start!

We formally presented her with a solar light. Ismael demonstrated how it worked to the whole class. They were salivating with jealousy but we told them that when we return in September, more will be distributed to the children who demonstrate the most improvement. They were literally jumping for joy.

Then we gave them great news. At the end of the year in October when we return, we're going to have a party day. Pizza, Pollo Campero and a trip to the pool/beach. They were screaming with delight. I told them they each had to finish 30 books and had to demonstrate improvement on their reading levels in the Raz Kids. Seemed like it would be no problem. They all discussed it amongst each other. Brandon made the comment about how sad it is in our own country that the children have SO many opportunities and supplies and they so often seem just bored with them.

I have to say that this program is truly exciting and I am so encouraged at the on-going possibilities!!!

Mayra presented the math certificates one day. The kids LOVED them and now they are all going to work hard so they can get all four. Mayra said that one girl just doesn't like math (not that she can't do it) and so she got mad when she was the only one who didn't get any certificate. Mayra said she folded her arms and frowned throughout the little ceremony. But Mayra thought that it would persuade her to start doing the work! We'll see!

I mentioned above that 15 of the computers are damaged due to the power surges. I brought them home and talked to Jim Skon about it. He's going to see what he can do.

BTW, the mayor's daughter comes to the program! Orfe says she is very smart!

**EMR** - worked great! Jim had put a "patch" (some kind of of fixer-upper thing) for the parts of the program that weren't working that well (like the demographic area). So now, everything is working great. We had a few down internet moments but not too many so by the time the patients came to me, all their info was in there and it really made things run smoothly and quickly.

Water filtration system: UNBELIEVABLE!!! Tim's contribution was invaluable. He got them both installed at the clinic and at the Parvulos. I know I won't do it justice to describe the process so I'm going to have put something in writing and attach it to this report.

We know actually have a means to provide true potable water to a LOT Of people in a manner that is easy to use and sustainable.

**Funeral** - We heard way too many stories of children being killed in accidents while we were there. Very sadly, one of the funeral processions walked right by our clinic

while we there. It was so ironic. We were in the middle of watching the "Happy Dance" video and getting ready to make our own when we realized the procession was coming. Apparently, some 14 year old boy from the department of Isabel (pretty far away) ran away from home to be with some 14 year old girl here. She and her little sister lived in the same building where Sr. Pam was staying - my guess is that Sr. Pam knows who they are. Gloria, we need to talk about telling Sr. Pam about it. Anyway, the boy was teaching the girl how to ride a motorcycle and she got on with her little sister. They took off and were immediately hit by a car and killed instantly. The funeral procession was the next day - they were going to the cemetery. There were several cars and about 100 people. The father of the child walked along with the first car and people were holding him by the arm. I didn't see the mom (if there was one). They had a stereo and speakers and a woman was singing a melancholy song in that high pitched piercing voice you often hear in churches there.

What struck me the most was how the kids in the clinic reacted to it. When we heard the procession coming, some of the kids already knew the story and started talking about it. A few of us walked to the clinic gate and some of the children joined us. No one cried. The kids didn't seem particularly upset. Once the procession passed, they moved on quickly to other things. I'm still very confused about all this. Think of how it would be handled in the U.S. There would be school counselors; school might be closed for the day. Children from the school would attend the funeral, etc., etc. This just seemed like a terrible "norm". Orfe and Ismael said that there are different kinds of parents and families - they tried to explain it to me but I really didn't get it. I almost thought there would be more sadness in certain animal groups. I guess it's a testimony to the reality that life in Guatemala is often cruel, harsh and so very random. I wonder if there are books written on this subject. I felt completely empty and confused.

Stove program - nothing to add.

**Orfe's group** - They made another 40 coffee bags and about 10 spongy "prayer kneelers". I bought them from her and we'll give them out as gifts to our donors and as things to use at the fundraiser. Orfe was VERY appreciative of the sewing machine that Lisa sent her. The small ones no longer work so now she has 3 good machines that really can be used for a variety of things. Maybe we can send someone who can teach more sewing skills on a trip. Keep your ears open!

**Daniel** - We visited his family. I brought the year's worth of supplies that I had gotten from that organization. They were so very, very grateful. They were teary and hugged us so sincerely. He still has a large deep "cavern" above his rectum. His mom packs it twice a day. It's clean and clearly not infected - she is such an amazing nurse! I gave her a long hemostat that will help her pack it. She is always so eager to learn new things to help him. Coral is paying for him to have a tutor and they are SOOO appreciative of that. They showed me the books he is working on. I guess he loves to draw. He gave 2 drawings and he signed them - one for me and one for

Coral!! I know that Dave Mallory has a great attachment to him and since Dave loves to draw, this might be a great relationship for the 2 of them to develop over the years.

**Flori's children** - We made an unannounced visit to Herbert's house (Flori's husband). He was away working in Poptun. Now, his father lives there along with 2 of his sisters and their children. It's a busy place! His new "wife" (now almost 15) proudly showed us her 10 month old son.

William and Joliana were SOOOO delighted to see us. I think it's really good for us to try to visit them every time we go - even if it's just a short time. We talked about the potential for them to join the after-school program on Saturday mornings. It's about a 30 minute car ride but they thought that Herbert might be able to bring them.

We gave them some books and small toys. You would have thought that won the lottery!! William was wearing one of the outfits we brought last time.

**Santos family** - I already described their response to our project in the last email. Hard to believe we raised so much money in such a short time - over \$14,000! Many thanks to Lisa for the very generous financial "match".

**Cement floor installation** - Another fabulous project. I wasn't involved and will ask Tim, Brandon and Mason to add to this report.

**To do:**

1. Finish up the changes on the drawings and Tim will send them to Fito.
2. Need printer for clinic - Coral can bring
3. Make more copies of award certificates and send them with Coral
4. Contact Dave about Daniel
5. Bring for next trip:
  - a. Diflucan
  - b. Metronidazole
  - c. Pretty much all pap supplies - we can buy speculums there but we need thin preps, cytobrushes (already have tons of spatulas),
  - d. Hematocrit pipettes
  - e. biopsy cups with formalin
  - f. More USN gel
  - g. doxycyclin
  - h. The patient trifolds with their health information on them. They really hang on to them and like them a lot. We need to put them on card stock and should make about a thousand for now.
  - i. Bring more annual reports for Orfe and Ismael to hand out
  - j. Need to make more formal pap and biopsy reports to give to patients - they always keep them and I know they are sharing them with other health care providers.
  - k. Order more math and reading certificates



- m. Order "graduation" certificates to present in October
- n. "fine" colored pencils for Daniel

6. We should set up a system where we are sending "consult" letters to the patient's other doctors. Eg. - when they have had previous abnormal paps or when they have seen another doctor for things like uterine prolapse, fibroids, etc.

7. Have Carmen send us list of when children are receiving de-worming and fluoride treatments; also heights and weights

### **Notes from Brandon ( I put this on the website blog)**

Trust. What is trust? I suppose we all have our own definition built on past experiences. Most would say trust is earned and then we proceed to have some sort of checklist that must be completed in order to bestow our trust upon another. Personally, my view of trust is some sort of equilibrium between positive actions building trust countered with negative actions breaking trust down; much like trying to build a house by placing bricks in the middle of a storm that keeps tearing them down.

What struck me most about this trip to Guatemala was the great amount of trust, unearned trust, bestowed upon our mission team by the people we had the opportunity to work with. This was most evident in three aspects of our trip; medical, water purification, and home remodeling.

Having spent the majority of the trip working with patients and helping medically, I was amazed by how much faith the patients had in me, a medical student, to talk with, examine, and even help solve some of their medical problems. In honesty, many probably trusted me more than I trusted myself. Another aspect of the trip where I saw trust was through the installation of 2 water purification systems; one in a school, the other in a local clinic. The trust here was easy to see as many people, both locals and members of our team, began drinking water out of the purifier moments after it had been installed even though there had been no test to guarantee the filter system worked properly. The risk of this trust: E. Coli, amoeba, or countless other health hazards and infections. Despite these risks, many people trusted us and drank the water without fear or doubt. The third aspect of our trip where I witness incredible trust was in the construction of a new concrete floor for a family. The evening we helped put in the floor we showed up at a house where there were piles of concrete mix laying outside. The owner of the home and soon to be new concrete floor was so happy to have us help and started letting us mix his concrete and place his floor without ever once questioning our credentials or even asking if any of us had ever laid a floor before in our lives.

What makes this reflection on trust most interesting is when you look at it from an "American Perspective".

Take a moment and think about it..

1. If you were doing a renovation on your house and a group of people walked up and said they were here to lay your floor, you would most likely ask what company

they were with. If they replied, "We are volunteers here to help", you would shut the door or stop listening entirely after the word "volunteer".

2. If some stranger showed up to your place of employment and started offering river water out of a machine and claimed it was clean to drink, you would most likely dismiss them completely. Now think about your children. If a stranger showed up to their school and started offering river water to them saying it has been purified, you would either start yelling at your child not to drink it or call the police to report the stranger for endangering children.

3. Imagine you walk into a medical office for care and encounter a young individual in scrub bottoms and a polo shirt who starts asking you questions about your health care. Would you ever trust them 100% without knowing their background or credentials? Probably not.

The three examples are not to say that we as a mission team did anything wrong, but rather they serve to demonstrate the great magnitude of trust that the people we encountered had in us. More importantly these three examples highlight the duty we have not to betray that trust they have placed in us. Going forward we have to remember that we are looked at with a high level of trust.

Where does this trust come from? I am in no position to say. Possibly it stems from the simple fact that we are American, or Gringos. Maybe it stems from their culture, which may be a more trusting culture than our own. Or maybe trust has its roots in faith and God. Whatever the reason, I know that the people I had the blessing to work with on this trip had a unshaking trust in me and that I had the responsibility to uphold that trust, something I tried my very best to do.

### **Notes from Tim**

#### Water systems

Public water supplies in Peten are typically untreated. Bacterial and solids content are high and, although Guatemalan born residents have a built up tolerance to the acute sickness that would immediately affect a US visitor drinking this water, long term health issues from unclean drinking water plague the Guatemalan people. Informed residents can purchase and drink bottled water but many cannot afford this luxury. SewHope has sought to find a clean source of free water that can be made available to anyone.

Two water purification systems were recently donated through SewHope by "Clean Water for the World" in Kalamazoo, MI. The new water systems use filtration to remove dirt and sediment that could harbor microbes plus ultraviolet light to kill bacteria. In June 2014, one of these systems was installed in the SewHope clinic where local residents can come to get drinking water. The other system was installed inside a local school. An outside spigot was provided to allow local residents to fill water containers in a common area without disturbing classes. SewHope hopes to add more water purification systems in other

communities in Peten in hope of raising overall health of the residents who cannot otherwise access clean drinking water.

### **Notes from Ashley**

Leading up to our trip to Guatemala, I knew first and foremost what my mission in being there was: to learn the ministry of SewHope so that I could help others learn more about the ministry when I returned. I have worked at a downtown Toledo homeless shelter for 6 years, I have traveled to remote parts of Africa and I have held people as they cried because their homes were washed up by hurricane Katrina. I have seen poverty before and so I felt that I was equipped to accomplish my mission and excited to begin my task. But the things I saw and experienced were far greater than any checklist I had in my mind. God had higher plans.

So there I was, standing in thick grass to my ankles, walking past re-used 7-up bottles that had been repurposed as water containers. Of course, that was because this home didn't have running water, let alone electricity. As I came closer to what we would have never called a "home" in America, my feet tripped over broken cement and gravel. And sitting there was a young man in a wheel chair. He and his 2 brothers suffered from muscular dystrophy. This was no ordinary home. This was a home filled with love, yet challenged by despair. Its walls were built with desperation, sticks and rubble hardly held together. Most of the home didn't even have a floor. Their mother was working in a field nearby

In my home, thousands of miles away, love looks like our family holding hands together and praying over our son before we tuck him in his bed safely at night. In this home, it looks like a newly single mother, whose husband had just been murdered, working 12-14 hour days in a field, working her hardest only to come up short and not even be able to provide even the basic of needs for those that she loves the most, her children.

I have seen poverty before. I have seen desperation before. But this, this was different. My eyes billowed up with tears, the lump in my throat was overwhelming, my heart sunk. I closed my eyes and wished that I had not seen the things I saw, or even worse, felt the things I felt. With knowledge comes power and with power comes great responsibility. It was in that moment that I realized that I had a choice. I could either ignore what the Holy Spirit was saying to me, and in a few days, return to my safe suburban home and return to my ways, acting as though my trip to Guatemala was like visiting the art museum. Or, I could move. Not a physical move, but a spiritual move. Something in my spirit shifted that afternoon. I realized that I had a responsibility, a great responsibility to these people. It is our calling, it is our mission, it is the work cut out for us by God himself to reach these people, to live amongst these people and most importantly to be the hands of Jesus Christ. It is a great honor and yet and overwhelming responsibility. There are some people who say they want to change the world and there are some people who actually just do it. The ministry of SewHope actually does it.