

A YEAR IN GUATEMALA

SUMMARY REPORT 2011

Plan is raising awareness about children's rights



About Guatemala

Guatemala is one of the world's most unequal countries, with massive differences between the wealthy elite and the poor majority.

Levels of violence at home, in schools and on the streets have increased in recent years.

Plan has been present in Guatemala since 1978, working with over 655 communities, benefiting more than 500,000 people. We work in partnership with national and local government, NGOs and community organisations.

Problems affecting the children of Guatemala

- A fifth of people in rural areas lack sanitation facilities.
- A fifth of children do not attend primary school.
- Many communities are not aware of children's rights.
- Guatemala is susceptible to natural disasters.



Young people talk about their main concerns about their community development.

PLAN'S PRIORITIES IN GUATEMALA

1 Improving education, health, nutrition and sanitation

- Helping more people access basic healthcare
- Promoting good hygiene, building latrines, and providing clean water
- Helping prevent HIV and AIDS
- Improving nursery and primary education
- Providing vocational training for young people

2 Getting communities, and children involved in development

- Supporting children's organisations and community groups to make improvements
- Helping local government to prioritise children's needs

3 Protecting children and young people

- Raising awareness about children's rights
- Helping reduce and support children affected by mistreatment
- Encouraging the government to act on legislation designed to ensure children's protection

4 Helping communities become more resilient to disasters

- Providing humanitarian assistance
- Ensuring children's rights are protected in emergencies
- Supporting reconstruction

By being a child sponsor, you have directly supported projects like the ones below. Your ongoing support sustains our long-term development work which impacts the lives of children, their families and communities for generations to come.

Together we are making an invaluable difference to the lives of people in Guatemala.

To learn more about Plan's work in Guatemala visit:

www.plan.org.au/ourwork/southernamerica/guatemala



Disability Support group members getting to know Margarita.

CASE STUDY: GIVING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES A BETTER CHANCE IN LIFE

When his daughter Margarita was born, Rene did not even know what Down's Syndrome was.

Disability is widely misunderstood in Guatemala and disabled children are among the country's most vulnerable. Many are born to poor families who find it difficult to understand their needs and care for them properly. Some are neglected, and many do not leave their homes because they are seen as an embarrassment to their families, as well as a burden and a punishment.

Plan is working to change this, by supporting groups of parents with disabled children. With our encouragement, the parents are beginning to learn more about disability and starting to demand more for their children. A good example is the group in Purulhá, central Guatemala. Encouraged by Balbina, Plan's child protection co-ordinator there, the parents have begun to fight for their sons and daughters' rights and needs to be met. Balbina is passionate about supporting children with disabilities, and works closely with families, helping them to understand more about their children's disabilities and how to care for them.

Rene's daughter Margarita is now six and has a happy life. Her parents love her and give her all the encouragement she needs. She runs around and plays happily, and communicates very well. Rene is now an expert on caring for children with Down's Syndrome, and his house is full of reference manuals, brochures and reports.

Overcoming prejudice

Many parents of children with disabilities initially feel a sense of rejection towards them, and the project has challenged widely-held negative feelings about disability.

Veronica has a heart problem. At first, her mother Irma found it very difficult to accept her, but she soon realised how much Veronica meant to her: "My husband said we would do everything possible to help her get better. I began to dedicate myself to her. The doctors at the hospital congratulated me because they said the only reason Veronica was still alive is because of the love I've given her."

One of the group's most important achievements is getting municipal authorities involved. Rene remembers when Balbina encouraged families to conduct a march to raise awareness of children with disabilities, and demand appropriate care from local authorities: "We never thought we would be able to do it, but we did!" The mayor donated a house to be used as a school for children with disabilities.

Now 102 children attend the school, including children with learning disabilities, Down's Syndrome, cerebral palsy, and deaf children. All find an open door and people who want to help them to develop. Plan has helped to equip and furnish the school, provided educational games, and adapted sanitation facilities.

Hope for the future

The families now have an even bigger dream. Balbina explains: "We want a larger school, with space to play and to accommodate many more children, and with specialised teachers to give expert support to each child."

As well as providing opportunities for children with disabilities, the group has also helped them to be more accepted in the wider community. This has been life-changing for many. Irma explains: "When you don't accept your child's illness, you don't want them to leave the house, but now I want everyone to see Veronica, to see how pretty she is and how marvellous it is to have her with me!"

Some names have been changed for child protection and privacy reasons

HIGHLIGHTS IN 2010

- Enabled 710 families to set up vegetable gardens which provide a more balanced and varied diet
- Supported 241 community banks which help 4,750 families develop ways of making a living and encourage saving
- Encouraged better management of water and sanitation in 385 communities, and trained children in 390 schools on good hygiene
- Learn Without Fear, our campaign against violence in schools, is working with 50 schools, 400 teachers, 10,000 students, and educational authorities from 12 municipalities.



Children voting for Youth Committee members who will be the voice of children to the mayor