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## MEF VISIT

Christine Eber

This month visited us in San Cristóbal our dear friend Christine Eber, president of Maya Educational Foundation (MEF), who has worked in Chiapas and Guatemala since the eighties. We had a chance to chat about the projects that Amigos will support in 2015, many of them thanks to the resources that come to us through MEF. We also talked about other projects in Guatemala MEF sponsors. Chris was particularly interested in knowing the work of VOCES MESOAMERICANAS. We were able to arrange a meeting with the staff of this organization for Chris's to chat with them. She was pleasantly impressed by what she heard. Probably through MEF, some partners of VOCES will get scholarships to continue their studies. We are grateful to MEF and Chris, who has had, for many years, a true chiapaneco heart.



## HAHN AIR FOUNDATION RENEWED THIS YEAR ITS FINANCING

Thanks a lot

Amigos de San Cristóbal is very grateful to the German foundation Hahn Air as this year renewed its funding. Ten per cent will go to operating expenses, but the rest will go directly to fund the following projects: Hogar Comunitario Yachi'il Antzetik, La Casa de las Flores,

Asociación de Productores La Jornada, Fundación Yirtrak, Granja y Tallers para Personas con Capacidades "Ángeles de Amor", Mujeres y Maíz Criollo, Colectivo Educación para la Paz y los Derechos Humanos, and Madre Tierra México.

## FORUM "SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT OF

### Early Childhood in the Highlands of Chiapas"

**O**n January 20 the Forum "Survival and Development of Early Childhood in the Highlands of Chiapas" took place in San Cristobal.

Under the slogan "Girls and boys are the present for a better future", the Kellogg Foundation brought together several civil society organizations in a space of dialogue and reflection on health and nutrition in early childhood in our state; a forum where participants tried to identify challenges and build solutions to improve the quality of life of indigenous children of Chiapas.

The operating team of Amigos de San Cristóbal was there since Amigos is one of the organizations that receive funding from the Foundation.

Verónica Fernández de Castro, program officer for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Kellogg Foundation gave welcoming remarks. "The issue of early childhood is an objective of the foundation. We want a society in which children can succeed. What excites us today is that it is a dialogue that can have a domino effect and can help us to take further actions on the issue."

At the beginning of the event, a brief background, objectives, methodology and expected outcomes of the Forum was made.

The speakers explained the progress of their work in 3 panels.

In the first one they talked about **the rights of early childhood and health care**. Jennifer Haza Gutierrez, director of Melel Xojobal, spoke of the situation of children in 3 municipalities in the Highlands of Chiapas. Martha Moreno, coordinator of Alianza Pediátrica Global (Global Pediatric Alliance) spoke about the challenges of traditional



midwifery in 6 municipalities in the Altos, in the context of maternal and child care. Representatives of the organization Sanando Heridas (Healing Wounds) presented a diagnosis that reflects the interaction of various factors affecting rights related to health, water and food in a community of Chenalhó.

Referring to the study that was carried on the work of midwifery in Chiapas, it is observed that the economic situation of the majority of midwives is of extreme poverty. 77% are illiterate and on average serve 8 to 10 deliveries a month. There is also a lack of recognition and support for its work in both health institutions and in their own communities. Their authority in their own places has been reduced and, on the other hand, in many health institutions they receive a derogatory and discriminatory treatment, a reflection of the double institutional discourse. In addition to this, there are few young women who want to become midwives.



The second panel was **on health and nutrition in early childhood**.

The director of Nutrition of FISANIM, Pilar Torre Medina Mora, provided an analysis of the evolution of child health and nutrition. Diagnosis of health and nutrition in the municipality of Sitalá was conducted by two organizations working in the area: DICADEM and CONIDER.

The coordinator of Save the Children presented the work "Knowledge and practices around breastfeeding and complementary feeding in the Highlands of Chiapas".

In panel 3 several organizations shared **their experiences of networking and existing partnerships for early childhood**. Alma Silva, executive vice president of the Board of Amigos de San Cristóbal and president of Desarrollo Educativo Sueniños (Educational Development Sueniños), spoke about the Network for the Rights of Children and Adolescents in Chiapas. The works of the Alianza por la Salud, Alimentación y Nutrición en Chiapas, (Alliance for Health, Food and Nutrition in Chiapas), the Nuestra Agua (Our Water) Project, carried out by the organization Cántaro Azul (Blue Pitcher), and a joint initiative to promote consistent breastfeeding through a photo contest, were exhibited as well. The space that held the event also served as a showroom to see some of the pictures of the contest.

After lunch, we shared a dynamic called "World Cafe" moderated by Ramón Martínez Coria.

Topics for discussion at the tables were about:

1. Challenges of survival and early childhood development in the region.
2. Reflection and analysis of proposals for joint action.
3. Summary and agreement on key issues.
4. Definition of commitments and tasks.

The scenario discussed in this forum was pretty bleak.

The food problem in Mexico is getting worse. Public policies are erratic, insufficient and inefficient. In indigenous communities consumption of junk food and sodas is seriously increasing. Early childhood is very unprotected with high rates of malnutrition, poor nutrition, diabetes, obesity and decreased habit of breastfeeding (only 14.4% of Mexican mothers breastfeed their babies). Furthermore, we are observing a transgenerational malnutrition. A clear example of this crisis is the high consumption of soft drinks. For indigenous communities Coca Cola represents the first step toward Western consumerism; it is a symbol of purchasing power; is accessible, inexpensive and, in recent decades, has even taken a ritual character.

Everything these organizations presented suggests that food and nutritional health of the population of Chiapas is seriously threatened. From the domestic sphere to the political field the challenge is huge. It is in forums like this where we can start to visualize the problem and become aware of the urgency of designing strategies that lead to solutions.



## CREATING A NEW COMMITTEE

Finance

This new committee was created earlier this year in order to enhance transparency and accountability of our organization, clarify the current status of resources, generate a proposal to improve the financial REPORT to the Board and to analyze better ways to manage the reserve and endowment.

We have been working on budgeting operating expenses for 2015, considering the amount spent in 2014 and restructuring expense categories to be more efficient in the report to funding agencies and donors.



## FLEA MARKET CHRISTMAS 2014

Joining forces

On December 13th the traditional Christmas Flea Market took place at the office of Amigos. This time we decided to make it smaller and less central, due to the amount of work involved last year when it was held in the Cathedral Square.

We open the doors to the public from 10:00 to 16:00. Many volunteers helped us sorting clothes, putting up posters, and selling. A sincere thanks to Anita Smart, commissioned this year to organize the flea market. We also thank the office staff (Ana Cristina and Bea) and volunteers like Isabel, Sara,

José, Lucía, Orly, Mayú, Rena, Nicholas, Teresa, Enrique, Manuel, Alison, Nancy, David, Christianne, Lupita and Alma.

Part of the unsold items will be stored for future flea markets and partly donated to organizations that have their own bazaar (Casa de Las Flores, Hogar Comunitario and Ángeles de Amor).

The sale was a success thanks to all donated items made by our friends and acquaintances. We were able to obtain funds for operating expenses of Amigos and make available to the organization our time and creativity. It was a very nice experience. Thanks to everyone who joined us on this day!!



## ROTARY CLUB AND MEMBERS OF AMIGOS

de San Cristóbal had breakfast

**O**n January 17, Ana Cristina Vazquez, operative director, Alma Silva, vice president and Anita Smart, from the projects committee attended the breakfast organized by the Rotary Club of San Cristóbal, which took place in the restaurant Frenzy. The goal was to make a presentation about our work and projects we are financing in 2015 and to exchange views on the philanthropic work of both organizations. It is noteworthy that two Rotarians purchased a membership of Amigos.

We thank the Rotary Club for having offered this space for exchange and collaboration.



## THE CITY OF GIRLS

One woman to woman support

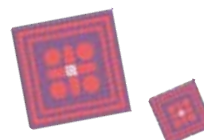
**O**n February 15 the cooperation agreement for the establishment and functioning of the organization The City of Girls was signed by the Na Bolom Cultural Association and the Yannini Group Foundation, headed by our dear friend Judith Yannini.

The fundamental objective of The City of Girls is to contribute to the integral development of vulnerable girls and Young women in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The project envisages the establishment of schools and job training centers in as well as different activities to promote the empowerment of our young women, with a gender perspective, with full regard to both cultural and ethnic identity, in a dignified and healthy environment free of discrimination.

The City of Girls will be held at property located on the street Flavio A. Paniagua No. 17, part of the



building "La Enseñanza - Casa de la Ciudad" in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Amigos de San Cristóbal sincerely congratulates Judy Yannini, whose enthusiasm and passion we deeply admire.



## MEMBERSHIP PARTY 2015

A space to share experiences and dialogue

On Saturday March 7th our annual Memberships party took place at the premises of the office of Amigos. The Memberships Committee was responsible for organizing the event in which we had plenty of food, drink, music and familiar faces.

The party was attended by about 45 people. The canapes offered by El Cau, wines and tapas as well as the lasagna that brought Lupita Yannini, our new head of the Committee will make history! A nice wine and salad accompanied the main meal, making the delight of the audience.

27 people and two companies renewed their membership, and there were new members; a very friendly way to renew their commitment to our organization. There were also several people who renewed their support in the months of January and February and others who wrote telling us they could not attend the party but would be happy to send us their contribution.

Thank you very much to all who, year after year, continue to renew their support to our projects and our organization.



## IN MAY, CONCERT TO THE BENEFIT OF AMIGOS

Horacio Franco

In the framework of the celebration of the 10 year life of Amigos de San Cristóbal we are organizing a concert performed by the internationally renowned flautist Horacio Franco. The repertoire, "Enamorada Travesía", is a journey through a series of poems by Marta Madrigal accompanied by flute music.



Horacio Franco is one of the most renowned Mexican artists; acclaimed by critics worldwide as one of the most important representatives of his instrument worldwide, he offers about 150 concerts a year. In England, the United States and Mexico. Mr. Franco has been involved in educational projects as well. He has had performances in important venues such as the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City, the Carnegie Hall in London, the Hall of the Berlin Philharmonic, the Tokyo Bunka Kaikan Hall and the Tel Aviv Tzavta, among others.

Martha Madrigal is a writer of short stories and poetry. Born in the state of Chiapas Marta has published eight books and her work is also in six anthologies.

The concert will be to the benefit of Amigos de San Cristóbal and the proceeds used to cover operating expenses of the organization.

You can not miss this event, because it is a privilege to have such artists in the cultural landscape of San Cristobal.

The concert will be on May 2, at 7:00 pm, in the auditorium of the Faculty of Law at the Autonomous University of Chiapas, ancient temple of San Agustín.

The ticket price is \$ 250 pesos bought in advance and \$ 300 at the box office the day of the event.

## OUR DEAR DAVID ORR TURNED 80 THIS MONTH

Happy Birthday!!

We want to send our most affectionate congratulations to David Orr, who turned 80 last March.

David is one of the founders of our organization and one of the pillars that sustain us. We take this opportunity to thank him for always encouraging the work of Amigos de San Cristóbal and maintaining contact with many supportive members and donors.



## MISIÓN CUMPLIDA

Madre Tierra México

**W**e have fulfilled the 2015 agreed commitment to the organization Madre Tierra, supporting part of the dental office project in the Sierra Madre of Chiapas. Congratulations to Mother Earth for their excellent work. Amigos de San Cristóbal is proud to work with such a great organization.



## EDITORIAL

**W**e are here because you were there ...". These words appeared a few years ago in the walls of Paris, when the French government decided to tighten its immigration policies. It was probably wrote by some North African migrant who, persecuted and stigmatized, decided to defend a fundamental human right: the right to mobility or right to migrate.

According to the United Nations Program for Development (UNDP) "is estimated at 214 million people the flow of international migrants worldwide, of which 40 million are undocumented migrants".

Human mobility has existed since the beginning of time, but today is larger than ever. Our country is one of the points from which many men and women go in search of a better life. It is also a transit territory for thousands of migrants from other countries, mostly Central Americans who must traverse four thousand miles of hell before reaching the most desired destination: the United States.

Migration policies that close borders are negatively affecting everyone involved in migration processes (migrants, family, friends, communities), which is reflected in the opening of more dangerous migration routes and the increasing



perception that migration is a crime to be pursued and punished. These considerations do not diminish the migratory flow; they only make it more difficult. The real danger to the physical integrity of the migrants is bigger than ever. Many die in the attempt; and of others, we never hear again. The situation is alarming, since during the past three years in Mexico at least 70,000 migrants have disappeared, while 22,000 have been abducted.

On their way, migrants are victims of a lot of crimes perpetrated both by Mexican authorities at various levels and institutions, and members of organized crime. These violations, ranging from violent reviews, unjustified detention, extortion, threats and theft, to rapes, murders, kidnappings and disappearances occur daily in Mexico under a blanket of impunity.

Being a border state, Chiapas is a territory must for many migrants, in places such as Palenque (Pakal-Na and Chacamax), Arriaga, Tapachula, Pijijiapan, Salto de Agua, Pichucalco, Juárez Station and Playas de Catazajá, which are recognized as such by the authorities. However, other regions of entry and passage for migrants have become especially dangerous points, such as the migratory corridor Huehuetenango - La Mesilla - Comitán, where a large number of women migrants have been killed, extorted, robbed, raped and abducted or coopted for forced sex work.

In the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas operates since 2009 the organization 'Voces Mesoamericanas. Acción con Pueblos Migrantes' (Mesoamerican Voices. Peoples Action with Migrants), dedicated to performing a comprehensive work with migrant population, addressing the following issues:

- Migrants who are detained or imprisoned in their way to the US or in their workplace.
- Migrants who stop communicating with no reason and nothing is known of them



(migrants unlocated or missing migrants)

- Children and adolescents who are traveling alone or with people smugglers (popularly known as *coyotes*) and who being minors face more dangers.
- Migrants who die in their workplace outside the community.
- Migrants who suffer accidents on the road or workplace, which may be in hospitals or without medical care.
- Migrant laborers who will work out of Chiapas and their rights as a person and worker violated.

Voces Mesoamericanas accompanies the migration process of both Chiapanecan and Central American migrants by offering:

- Information about the options migrants have to face their problems.
- Legal advice when a criminal proceeding is initiated in the seek for justice.
- Responsible channeling for support of public institutions and civil society that have more experience in how to solve problems faced by the

migrant population.

- Psychosocial accompaniment to emotionally strengthen migrant population, their families and communities, seeking collective alternatives and answers to problems.

- Special care in Tseltal and Tsotsil languages, as well as oral and written translations, targeting migrants from these ethnic groups.

From January 2015, Amigos de San Cristóbal is funding part of the project "Children and migrant indigenous youth in Chiapas: retaking memory and rethinking the ways", devised and implemented by the team of Voces Mesoamericanas. The purpose of the project is to strengthen indigenous migrant children and youth of Chiapas, through a strategy of action organized along three axes:

1. A research - action strategy of the issues that the children and young people must face for their indigenous identity and migrant condition prioritizing that these are expressed from the voice and look of the subjects themselves;
2. A social impact, informing and sensitizing indigenous migrants and urban-rural population of the Highlands of Chiapas on the subject;
3. Strengthening the social net of indigenous youth and returnees or people linked to migration in order to intensify exchanges of experiences and artistic expressions that they have developed from the "Self-Management Program and Migrant Indigenous Organization" carried out by Voces Mesoamericanas since 2012.

All of us, either because our ancestors decided so or because we've chosen to move from our place of birth to another site, are descended from migrants or are migrants. Therefore and

appealing to human solidarity to the most vulnerable, we must assume that responsibility for safeguarding the rights of those who want or have to migrate belongs to the society as a whole. The migrants are a mirror of what our grandparents, were, of what we are, of what our children may be. They need and deserve our support.

(Ana Cristina Vázquez. Directora Operativa de Amigos)

