

"If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time.

But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s

Intern Update

TATAMAGOUCHE CENTRE —
BREAKING THE SILENCE

DECEMBER 2012

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Many interns have written more in-depth articles about their experience in Guatemala. Click [here](#) to read more!

11 Years of CIDA

Funded Interns

By Jackie McVicar & Kathryn Anderson

In August 2000, Breaking the Silence (BTS) and Tatamagouche Centre offered its first Young Adult delegation, led by Margie Loo and Kathryn Anderson. Kathryn remembers the delegation debriefing: "Two of the participants mentioned that they had been Coady (International Institute) Interns and recommended that Tatamagouche Centre consider applying to CIDA. So we did!" The first year six interns were sent to work with Guatemalan Partner Organizations. "With many learnings, we decided we would continue, as all valued the experience." Three of the first 6 interns ended up returning to Guatemala as international human rights



Interns & Coordinators at Tatamagouche Centre, July 2012.

accompaniers and another returned as a volunteer with the New Hope Foundation. Since then, TC/BTS has coordinated over 60 internships in Guatemala (and 3 in Honduras in 2004-05); many of these interns have continued to stay involved with the network in both Canada and Guatemala. "The rest is history!"

The 2012-2013 project cycle marks the end of the TC/BTS CIDA IYIP experience for now. It has been a pleasure learning, working and growing in solidarity with you!

Kathryn was the Intern Coordinator from 2001-2006 and Jackie has been working with interns since 2006.

Wyanne Sandler

It has been another great year working with the Tatamagouche Centre-CIDA interns. From interviews to pre-departure orientation and reflection weekends in Guatemala, it has been wonderful to get to know this capable, thoughtful, and committed group of young people better. It is truly a gift to share in their reflections as they learn and grow in this life-changing experience. I am often reminded of how challenging these internships can be, and also of what an amazing opportunity they are. As we heard at the intern reunion in 2011, many of us continue to draw on our experiences as interns in our professional and personal lives years after returning. As many of you know, at this point we do not have funding to continue sending CIDA interns. Nonetheless, I hope that we will be able to draw on the learnings from this program and on our committed network of former interns as we think about creative and meaningful ways that we can continue to work in solidarity with our friends and counterparts in Guatemala. *Wyanne has been working with BTS interns since 2010.*

Aleksandr Stabenow

After five weeks of Spanish school I began my placement at the CCDA. When I first started everyone was very nice, however there was still quite a communication barrier. During the first few weeks, a lot of time was spent in the office reading books until someone would come ask me to go to a community with them. Although it felt like a very slow period, looking back I can see it gave me great insight into the CCDA's current projects and how the organization typically interacts with a community. At about week four, James and I were assigned supervisors and projects to work on. My supervisor, Wilson, is an agronomist and works on many projects related to coffee and agriculture. As work teams were formed, I began developing closer relationships with my co-workers at the CCDA and have become accustomed to the culture of the organization and the personalities around the office. There were still

many slow days spent typing up survey results into Excel, however after that was through I started to learn more about the long-term projects I would be helping with.

The first of these projects aims to make it easier for local coffee farmers to make the transition from conventional to organic produce. The second project involves researching the feasibility of producing and exporting macadamia nuts. When I was assigned this task, I assumed I would be working with others as part of a team, however it turned out that I'm the sole person working on the macadamia nut project, and with a presentation date looming.

As the weeks went on, I learned more about problems the CCDA has been having with their coffee production. I started thinking of how these issues might be addressed. One of the main problems

is that the CCDA has to borrow from banks at a 12% interest rate to buy coffee, which is not paid back to the bank until the CCDA gets paid for the coffee sold and exported. As a side project, I have also been working to create a pool of Canadian investors to invest at a much lower interest rate. I have set up meetings with investment brokers over Christmas holidays to figure out the logistics and viability of this project.

While the CCDA does have a lot of projects they are working on, they always go where they feel they are needed. In early October, James and I had the privilege of attending a caravan of solidarity and small ceremony in Totonicapán, where the shootings took place only days before. The CCDA experienced great disappointment once again as the Agrarian/rural development law was not passed by congress and will have to wait another year to be introduced.

Comité Campesino del Altiplano —CCDA

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James Goldie

Hola from San Lucas Totolimán! It's hard to believe we've already passed the half-way mark; my time here at the CCDA has been flying by. I'm working with the organization's vice-president, María Gomez, on a program she coordinates: "The Political Formation Process: Exercising Active Citizenship at a Local and National Level". (It's a mouthful in Spanish, too!) I accompany her and another colleague to various communities around Lake Atitlán, where they are providing local men, women, and youth with educational workshops about their rights as citizens and how they can exercise these rights and present demands before local authorities.

I've been learning lots about community, municipal, and regional political structures here in Guatemala – there are so many different levels of government reporting to each other (committees called COCODEs, COMUDEs, and CODEDEs, plus the mayor's office and the municipal council). The bureaucracy can be overwhelming for even the most politically conscious citizens, let alone rural villagers who have very limited access to formal education but who are usually impacted the most by the decisions of municipal leaders. Throw in high levels of corruption, vote-buying, mismanaged funds, etc., and one can really see the importance of these workshops. Except that's not always the case; one of the challenges faced by my colleagues at the CCDA is demonstrating the ways in which this information is important and relevant to life in rural villages, where people work extremely long

days to provide for their families and are not accustomed to sitting through workshops.

Although helping out María with her project is my primary role here, every day is different at the CCDA. Flexibility is key, as plans can change at the drop of a hat; with very little warning, what was looking to be a quiet day at the office can suddenly change into a 4:00am bus ride to the capital to for a meeting or rally. You just never know! In early October, Aleksandr and I had the privilege of attending a small ceremony on the roadside where the Totonicapán massacre took place only days before. We've also had the opportunity to sit in on planning sessions for national-level demonstrations organized by the CCDA and other *campesino* groups. So much has happened during this first half of the internship, I can't imagine what the second half has in store for us.

Kaqchikel Presbytery Update

Sarah Fleming

¡Saludos del Presbiterio Kaqchikel! It has been five months since I started this internship and the education I have received has been significant. I really do learn something new every day! My time is divided between the communities of Labor de Falla, Cerro Alto and Bolo de Oro. As well, I spend some days doing work at the Presbytery's office. I recently just completed a series of translations for the Presbytery that were challenging but rewarding nonetheless. In the communities (about 30 minutes away from Chimaltenango by bus) I run English classes with a small but devoted group of girls. Currently, they are on summer vacation but they still attend English classes! We have started a community vegetable garden at the school in Labor de Falla and I hope that when we see some of the vegetables take form, the women who prepare lunch for the school will be able to use them.

I attend the Women's microcredit group meetings and have taken on different roles. In Labor de Falla, there are two meetings a month and at one per month, I facilitate health talks. We have discussed children and disability, as well as threats to the natural environment. In the Bolo de Oro group, I sit and listen and am usually asked to count up the numbers at the end of the meeting to make sure everything matches. The two groups represent different roles and I am learning from getting to know the women in different capacities. I am humbled by their breadth of knowledge and resilience.

The Kaqchikel Presbytery Celebrated its 25th Anniversary in 2012! More information to come in our 2012 Year in Review, which will be published in January 2013.

CEIBA By Zoë Barrett-Wood

Food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture, gender equity and women's health, the struggle against mega mine and hydroelectric dam projects – these are the “themes” of Ceiba's work, the passions of my dedicated co-workers, and the topics that I am lucky enough to be learning about here in Guatemala

As part of the Communications Team, I have been learning from and, in some cases, lending a hand with projects and events related to each of Ceiba's main work themes. I have created a website for a school for rural, resource-poor indigenous youth, which incorporates Maya culture, language, history, values, and cosmovision into the curriculum. I am currently assisting them with efforts to attract volunteers and to secure funding. I have also developed eco-education activities to be used by Ceiba's “Sustainability School” – a program that involves weekly visits to schools to promote learning around the topic of “sustainability”.

Currently my main projects are two documentary films – one about the social and environmental impacts of sugar plantations, and one about the use of native corn varieties by small-scale farmers. Getting film footage for these documentaries has provided me with invaluable insight into the lives of rural Guatemalan people. I've been amazed and inspired by the determination, resilience, kindness, and collective spirit of the people I have been lucky enough to meet and interview.

I look forward to the coming months, which will bring more filming, copious amounts of video editing, fun times with co-workers and friends, and, as always, important and inspiring experiences, insights, and understandings.

Educating to Empower: Life at the New Hope Foundation

Scott Zoltok

I write this reflection after having spent an incredible 3 months at one of the most wonderful schools I've ever had the fortune to visit. From day one, I was struck by the originality of the Foundation's alternative pedagogical approach, which pushes students to see education as a joint endeavor to create knowledge through transformative dialogue. The teachers at the school brim with pride over the students' positive participation and attitude, and I can see why. In addition, I have the fortune of working at the New Hope Foundation during a very exciting time. The school is implementing a new high school program dealing with rural development and community well being. I have the exceptional opportunity to contribute to the future teacher manuals relating to this program, which has given me a chance to both add into, and learn from, the Foundation's alter-

native approach to education that has me completely enamored. I teach half a dozen English classes a week, which means I've developed some great memories with lots of the students, and I look forward to developing many more. The students have almost finished building their ‘camino de la memoria’ (Trail of Memory), a guided hike through the nearby countryside that sheds light on the turbulent history of the Rabinal municipality. This project encourages the students to take part in the reconstruction of their own history, and the logistics of building the concrete kiosks means they put the skills learned in math class to work. I've learned more than I could've imagined since my arrival at the Foundation, and I look forward to 4 more months of transformative times with some wonderful students and teachers.

Ongoing struggle for justice:

Rabinal Legal Clinic Update

Nelly Marcoux

At the *Asociación Bufete Jurídico Popular de Rabinal* (or, as we affectionately call it, “the Bufete”), efforts to achieve justice for the atrocities committed against the Achí people of Rabinal during the armed conflict continue. Besides affording me the privilege of beholding a powerful example of dignity, courage and resilience, working at the Bufete has also proven to be a crash course in the challenges, dilemmas and complexities inherent to the project of pursuing truth, justice and reparations through legal systems.

A recent Inter-American Court ruling against the Guate-

malan state for the Rio Negro massacres perhaps is indicative of changing winds, as survivors’ voices and tireless clamor for justice are increasingly heard in both the domestic and international spheres. Yet, much work remains to be done, and pushing two cases through the Inter-American system is no small task. At the Bufete, it means working hard to fulfill the Inter-American system’s criteria for admissibility; conducting field work to gather evidence and enlist witness participation in eventual debates; defining litigation and communication strategies; managing the logistical and evidentiary difficulties associated with building a case from the ground up, 30 years after the

facts, in extremely adverse conditions; and building lasting and mutually supportive relationships with participant communities and partner organizations, just to name a few. It also means racing against the clock, since as years go by, witnesses grow old and pass away, many as a result of the long-term consequences of the violations they suffered. This work is accomplished against the backdrop of limited human and economic resources to attend to seemingly boundless need.

Hence continues the long and difficult struggle for justice at the Bufete; it takes courage, patience and an unfaltering commitment to vindicating the memories of the dead and disappeared, and to recreating the lively and thriving communities that once were and still can be, despite having been so deeply and purposefully hurt.

Achi Women’s Office

Winnie Bower

Since my arrival at the Achí Women’s Office in the *Asociación Bufete Jurídico Popular* at the beginning of August, I have learned so much. Its wonderful to see some of the ideologies that I discussed so frequently in my Social Work degree put into practice with the people of the community of Rabinal. Often working from a narrative perspective, the women’s office coordinator, the psychologist, and I, head out to nearby communities to hear women’s stories of their experiences with violence during the Guatemalan internal armed conflict as well as their experiences of violence in the aftermath of the war. Women’s stories are all unique, but they all hold a similar truth: violence in Guatemala still continues to affect women’s lives in a variety of ways.

The work that I have been taking part in in the Women’s office has been directly dealing with this violence in many

forms. Whether its through prevention in workshops with secondary school students, holding workshops for women to share their stories of violence, and help to better understand why there is still violence today, house visits with women who are still experiencing violence or its residual effects, or assisting women who are in the process of bringing their case to court.

Most recently we have been focusing quite a lot on providing workshops to 10 different secondary schools in rural areas surrounding Rabinal. This has been a main focus, as schools just recently wrapped up for the year, and we had to squeeze in as many workshops as possible! Our most recent workshop was discussing food sovereignty in communities, and what it means to have food sovereignty here in Guatemala. Other topics that we have recently covered include, cultural identity, historic memory and violence, and women’s rights.

Another huge portion of my time has been spent navigating and understanding

the ins and outs of the important task of grant proposal writing. Whether its translating a mid-term report from Spanish into English to be sent off to our funders, or writing up grant proposals for new funding, I have learned a lot about how to ask for financial support in a variety of forms. I have also come to understand the precarious nature of funding, and how we must always be on the ball to secure other sources of income to continue doing the important work that the office does. Without these funders, the important and necessary work that the Bufete does would not be possible.

There is no typical day in the office for me. A whole day could be spent travelling around to communities to visit women, heading to a school to give a workshop, helping to set up a workshop with women, or simply just translating documents in the office. I am excited to continue supporting the work of the office over the next few months, and then have the opportunity to bring back what I have experienced and learned back to Canada to share with others.



Breaking the Silence (BTS)
Rompiendo el Silencio (RES)

The 2013 BTS Annual Gathering will be held at Tatamagouche Centre March 15-17. Join us for a weekend of solidarity, learning and of course, hearing from our recently returned interns! For more information, contact btsmaritimes@gmail.com.

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Check out our new blog
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IMAP

By Lia Chiasson

I have spent much of my life working on environmental issues, and it can be an overwhelming business and it may be tempting to give up because of the size of the task. IMAP has pushed me to see environmental challenges with new eyes and I have found myself rekindling with something that I had left by the sidelines.

IMAP's work has taken a strong educational focus this year. In my short time here, I have participated and helped prepare workshops on grey water filtration, seed conservation, seed banks, apiculture, permaculture design, and much more. Moreover, numbers of workshops have increased in the five communities in which IMAP is currently working. This focus has been met with much success, therefore; IMAP wants to expand their ability as an education centre and hopes to eventually be able to receive bigger groups on site, such as schools for full interpretative programs. As such, IMAP has been working on the development of three interpretative routes: ancestral

knowledge, alternative technologies, and food production.

A second focus has been the seed guardian campaign. Launched this past month, the campaign has focused on teaching people about seed saving and production. The goal is for people to learn that they do not have to be dependent on big chemical companies for their seeds and their security. The launching of this campaign has led to important conversations on food sovereignty and of the intrinsic value of seeds. IMAP has continuously worked with seeds however, this year and in the following years this will be taking precedence. While I have been helping with all these projects, it is not to stay that I have not spend my fair share of time working in the dirt (as it should be!)

The biggest challenge when it comes to the environment is us. What I have learned is that environmental degradation is not a challenge or a fight but our chance to relearn to live with nature and its patterns, by understanding our vulnerability and appreci-

ating it. Permaculture principles have reminded me of simple lessons: take time to think and obstacles that seem full of problems are laden with solutions.

IMAP's approach continues to be one of hope and ingenuity. Their success lies in their ability to learn and use nature as the example. The results have been that they are having direct impacts on the lives of communities. We learn from experience and we should speak from experience; we all have experience with our environment, IMAP is actively listening to that experience.

Permaculture 101: Come join us for the day and gain insights, inspiration, and tools to become an active member of the global permaculture movement! One-day workshop with former intern and permaculturalist Stephanie Hughes and a special guest from IMAP.
Contact Tatamagouche Centre to Register.



breakingthesilenceblog.com