

Kathryn Wasserman Davis 100 Projects for Peace
Project Proposal

Mi Refugio, Guatemala: Peace Through Education

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Project Description and Background

Mi Refugio is a Christian school which began through the efforts of one woman, Kari Engen. The school, located 15 miles outside Guatemala City, provides education, food, clothing, medical assistance, and outreach services to over 250 students and their families. Currently Mi Refugio serves children preschool age through sixth grade, with plans in existence to augment the services provided by adding high school classrooms. These students travel from their homes in the Guatemala City garbage dump where they scavenge for food, clothing, recyclables, and building materials. The residents of the city dump live in a harsh world where drug addiction, glue sniffing, and violence are part of their daily lives.

Ms. Kari Engen started Mi Refugio 12 years ago. Originally the school was located just outside the city dump, but the school soon outgrew itself. It was relocated in order to accommodate the growing population and to create a safer learning environment for the students. Mr. Harry Engen, father of Kari Engen, has been advocating for the school for many years. Mr. Engen runs the finances state-side and travels to Guatemala three times per year to conduct business transactions and oversee construction projects and missionary groups on the site of the school. He has approved of our project proposal.

Goals and Objectives

"For peace and non-violence to prevail, we need to: foster a culture of peace through education, promote sustainable economic and social development, ... and ensure equality between women and men."

UNESCO www3.unesco.org/iycp/uk/uk_ep.htm.

We believe that peace comes from empowerment through education. Our goal is to assist Mi Refugio complete plans for their high school by beginning a co-op program. A sewing course, still in the stages of infancy, has been implemented this past year. However, the machines are out of date and often have many malfunctions. We hope to offer sewing classes to those who wish to learn a trade in order to rise out of their current poverty stricken environment. This will be accomplished by:

- Jumpstarting a sustainable co-op
- Providing necessary machinery and raw materials to the school
- Hiring instructors for a sewing workshop
- Supplying the power and energy needed
- Marketing products created by students

We will travel to Mi Refugio in June of 2007 in order to implement our project. Students will be recruited through contacts that Kari Engen has already established with the people of the Guatemala City dump. Ten high-school age students will be admitted to the sewing shop. Priority will be given to previous graduates of Mi Refugio, followed by students showing exceptional commitment and need. Each will be given a 6-week course, learning their trade and producing various products along the way. These products will be marketed with local vendors, with proceeds being used to purchase more raw materials such as fabric, thread, and other sewing necessities. The co-op will be further sustainable in that two exemplary students will be chosen at the end of the semester to teach the next class of students the trade. Participants may remain in the co-op as long as desired provided they return a portion of the proceeds back to the program fund. Profits will be shared among the participants once the new raw materials are purchased.

Creativity and Innovation

Our project supports peace through the grassroots development of a co-op that provides education and leadership opportunities in order to alleviate poverty. Grassroots development actively involves local people in the decision-making process and allows for a more responsive and effective development program. Education will bring with it a sense of empowerment and increased opportunities. With this new knowledge, the people will be able to pursue more traditional and higher-paying jobs. Empowering the people of the area and providing a clear path in which to escape poverty will decrease desperate acts such as drug abuse and violent territorial conflicts, thereby promoting peace.

Entrepreneurship

The students of the sewing program will be educated in simple business skills, such as production costs, reasonable selling costs, net profits, etc. The students will then have the necessary skills to market their products and maintain a fund to replenish supplies.

Products will be sold in two ways (1) at a local market venue and (2) through the continued support of the mission teams that visit each year. Some products created by the co-op will be returned to the U.S. in order to advocate for Mi Refugio, making area university communities, churches, and other organizations aware of the circumstances and the great need of the Guatemalan people. We will be presenting Powerpoint slideshows and displaying the artisan's crafts, as well as holding raffles in order to raise funds to contribute to the school.

Student Background

My name is Danielle Winter and I am a junior at Bucknell University. I am pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish. I have traveled to Mi Refugio, Guatemala six times on mission trips with my church, Mt. Zion UCC. On these trips I have become familiar with the faculty and staff of Mi Refugio, and have participated in construction projects and medical outreach missions there. I am deeply passionate about advocating for the students at Mi Refugio and seeking ways in which to help them escape the harsh cycle of poverty.

Julie Pfromm is a senior at Bloomsburg University. She will graduate in May with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and a minor in Sociology. She plans to pursue humanitarian work with non-profit organizations and has a passion for giving a voice to those who are not heard. She has completed her fieldwork in Belize and is acutely aware of the impoverished living conditions present in many Central American countries.



Residents of the Guatemala City Dump.

A scene from the Guatemala City Dump.

