

# Guatemala Village Health

Improving Lives One Village at a Time



Guatemala Village Health

Newsletter Issue 12, December 2024

Our mission is to improve individual and village health in rural Guatemala through education, empowerment of local leaders, and development of local health professionals.

As 2024 comes to a close, we are grateful for all you have done to help improve the health and well-being of the villagers in Guatemala.

## Making the Difference for Indigenous Women & Babies

*By Jennifer Hook*

Some children face immense challenges from birth, but with compassion and support, brighter futures are possible. Avelino\*, a baby boy from the remote village of Seacacar in El Estor, Izabal, was born into difficult circumstances. His mother, Rosalina\*, struggled with the trauma of her pregnancy, which resulted from violence. Overwhelmed by her situation and limited resources, Rosalina was unable to bond with and provide adequate nutrition for her baby. Avelino became severely malnourished and dehydrated.

Last February, during the Guatemala Village Health (GVH)/Aldeas Sanas Guatemala (ASG) team trip, Olivia, the community midwife (comadrona), brought Rosalina and Avelino in for help. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, our team immediately stepped in, obtaining formula to nourish and hydrate Avelino with referral to nutrition services.



Over the following months, the comadrona and our health team provided support to Rosalina. When Avelino reached six months, he was enrolled in our baby program, ensuring continued access to nutrition supplements and monitoring of his development. Today, Avelino is thriving—he's gaining weight, developing normally, and his radiant smile is a source of joy.

Most importantly, Rosalina has found healing and happiness in bonding with her son. Their story is a powerful reminder of how community care and dedicated support can transform lives. We are deeply grateful to our donors and partners for enabling this life-changing work. Together, we're fostering resilience and building healthier futures for families like Rosalina and Avelino's.

*\* names changed to protect identity*

# Permaculture as a Permanent Solution to Malnutrition

By Vladimir Melgar

Families battling malnutrition and food insecurity were excited to start their own permaculture gardens and forests after being trained in this sustainable method of farming, by our staff.

During the 30 year civil war in Guatemala knowledge of farming was lost by the Mayan communities. In 2024, after several years of pilots, this project became a reality for 30 families across 7 communities in the villages of El Estor. GVH supported them to cultivate thriving nutritional gardens filled with a variety of vegetables, and fruit tree forests. The combination of permaculture practices, regenerative agriculture, and the use of compost from our composting toilets not only addresses immediate nutritional needs but also lays the foundation for long-term environmental and economic resilience.



One father brought his 12 year old son, Edwin, to the permaculture workshops done in Chinachabilchoch by our staff in Q'eqchi. He was so excited that he returned home and planted the entire hillside with malanga, camote (sweet potatoes), yuca, cafe, bananas, limones, yampi, and more.

Our Healthy Homes program also saw incredible progress in 2024. We installed smokeless stoves made from locally produced bricks in the community of Semanzana, placed 35 new water filters while continuing to monitor the 250 already in use, and provided ongoing support for the 200 composting toilets that have been transforming communities for over five years.

It is inspiring to see dramatic effects of this project. Families are eating healthier, children are growing stronger, and communities are building resilience. The Permaculture team reflects on 2024 with immense satisfaction, thrilled by the success they've witnessed and the empowerment they've helped bring to these communities. Your donations made this project possible!



"I feel happy and grateful to GVH and Aldeas Sanas Guatemala for trusting me and for the opportunity to accompany families and monitor the development of their family gardens and fruit forests in their homes in addition to teaching them how to cook healthy meals with the vegetables that they have grown themselves. We have made the project work with the training and follow-up we have given each month. I am thrilled by the project's success and for the opportunity to be part of it. The hands-on approach we're taking with each family shows the kind of support that makes a lasting difference in communities. Here's to an impactful 2025 and to reaching even more families with this transformative work!"

- Aníbal Choc

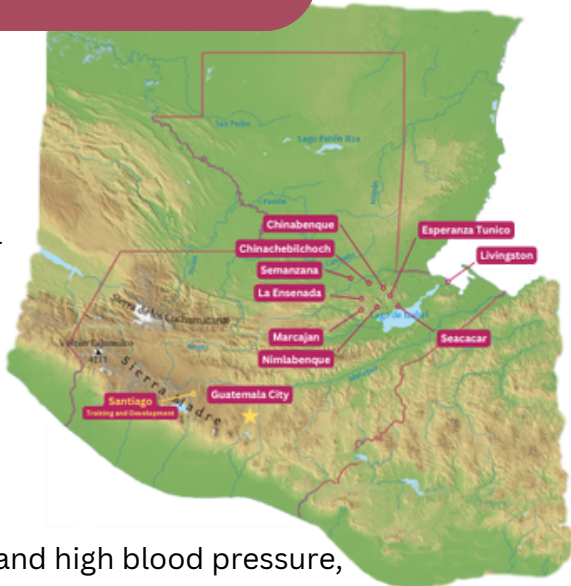
Looking ahead, we're excited to expand the program. While 30 families participated this year, 40 more are waiting to start in 2025. With the ongoing support of our donors and partners, we're confident that the impact of this work will continue to grow.

**We are deeply grateful to our donors for their unwavering trust and support and to our team for their perseverance and passion. Together, we are building a healthier, more sustainable future for Guatemala.**

# A Day in the Life of the Village Medical Team

By Lesbia Xi and Julio Choc

Lesbia Xi and Julio Choc, dedicated members of the GVH medical team, live and work in the villages of El Estor, Izabal, and share a passion for improving the health and lives of the most vulnerable. A typical workday for Lesbia and Julio begins at 5 a.m. They travel 24 kilometers by 4 wheel drive to begin seeing patients at 7:30 am. Working closely with Ministry of Health staff, Julio weighs and measures infants in the **Healthy Babies** program and distributes nutritional supplements to babies 6-24 months while offering educational sessions to parents about health.



Lesbia sees patients with diabetes and high blood pressure, providing them with the necessary medications as part of our **Chronic Disease** program. She also sees women of childbearing age with the lay midwives, providing contraception and prenatal care that is crucial for reducing maternal mortality and ensuring healthier pregnancies through our **Healthy Moms** program.

Support from our donors makes possible our Healthy Babies program which includes almost 200 babies currently receiving monthly Nutrilisto supplements. Over 570 babies have graduated from our nutrition program since it began. The Healthy Babies program also includes parasite treatment and fluoride varnish for teeth.

Our rural health technician, Nineth manages our **Healthy Schools** program bring tooth brushes, toothpaste and fluoride to 1500 students in 10 communities.

## Volunteer of the Year: Joanne Leovy, M.D.

We are delighted to honor Dr. Joanne Leovy as GVH's Volunteer of the Year! Joanne has joined us on four trips to Guatemala, serving as both trip physician and, once, as trip leader. When asked what motivates her, Joanne shared: "I admire GVH's persistent focus on empowering villages to educate and provide preventative care, including family planning, to save lives." We're incredibly grateful for Joanne's dedication and the impact she's made in Guatemala!



## Introducing the First Executive Director of Aldeas Sanas Guatemala: Liset Olivet!

We are thrilled to welcome Liset Olivet as the first Executive Director of Aldeas Sanas Guatemala, our partner organization in Guatemala. She joined us in June 2024, bringing extensive expertise in health organization development with a wealth of experience in international organizations and the nonprofit sector. Her decision to take on this role was inspired by her deep commitment to addressing the challenges and inequalities faced by underserved communities and her passion for making a meaningful impact. Fully bilingual in Spanish and English, her dedication to GVH's work and her vision for sustainable healthcare solutions bring a fresh and dynamic perspective to our team. We look forward to the impactful changes she will lead in the coming year.



# New Board Members and Staff!



**Verónica Zidarich**  
Board Member

Veronica is from Argentina, where she began her architectural career working on low-income housing projects. Her dedication to improving living conditions for underserved communities laid the foundation for her lifelong commitment to socially responsible architecture.



**Deirdre Meyer**  
Board Member

Deirdre is co-owner of Meori, Inc. and brings two decades of marketing and sales expertise to her role at GVH. Having spent 15 years living in Germany, Deirdre has a global perspective that enriches her professional and personal life. Deirdre and her husband have three adopted children from Guatemala.



**Becca LaNasa**  
Board Member

Becca combines her business insight with a strong commitment to social impact through workforce development, advocacy, and strategic partnerships. Holds dual citizenship between the US and Brazil, enhancing her ability to connect with diverse populations.



**Lily Muehlhausen**  
Program Assistant

Lily is a recent graduate of Seattle University and excitedly joined GVH as our Program Assistant because of her passion for global health. Lily is interested in the intersection of healthcare and social justice and plans to travel with GVH next year.

## Mark your Calendars for the Health, Hope, and Progress Auction: May 17th, 2025!

Join us at the Daybreak Star Center for our annual fundraising event - we hope to see you there!



## Join GVH's Circle of Caring!

We are excited to announce the Circle of Caring, a special giving society for those who wish to make a meaningful impact on our programs for children and families in rural Guatemala. Members enjoy exclusive benefits, including recognition at our annual reception, a Circle of Caring pin, and unique opportunities to engage with our founders and team in Guatemala.

Membership starts with a yearly gift of \$1,000 or smaller donations throughout the year that total this amount.



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## GVH Staff in Guatemala

Executive Director: Liset Olivet  
Medical Director & Physician: Alejandra Zarazúa  
Director of Projects in Public Health: Vladimir Melgar  
Logistics/Pharmacy Assistant: Santiago Melgar  
Community Health Educator: Julio Choc  
Auxiliary Nurse: Lesbia Xi  
Rural Health Tech: Nineth Ché  
Permaculture/Project Assistant: Anibal Coc

## GVH Staff in USA

Director of Development & Operations:  
Susan Bean  
Cofounder & Director of Programs:  
Jennifer Hoock  
Program Assistant: Lily Muehlhausen  
Director of Technology: Sean Murphy

## Board of Directors

President: Marcelo Suárez  
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Rinat Hackmon  
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Deirdre Meyer  
Becca LaNasa