



## **Pandemic Response**

**Updated May 6, 2021**

Our project partners in Oaxaca who serve and support vulnerable children and their families have continued to show dedication, resilience, flexibility, and creativity throughout these difficult months. We are so grateful for their work, and to our donors who so generously contribute. As of this writing there are signs of improvement in Oaxaca, which has moved out of the most restrictive “red” zone, and into “yellow.” Vaccinations for teachers and the 50+ age group are beginning. But the crisis is far from over and the impacts will linger for a long time. Many regular donors have been able to increase their support because they are not travelling or eating out as often; our partner agencies are allocating these funds wisely. Here are some of their pandemic stories.

### **The Education Project for Girls**

Canadians are helping a record number of young women from remote villages to access education through the Education Project for Girls. (Formerly called the High school Project. Now we can also support young women who go to university.) However, the pandemic-imposed switch to online learning created a host of technological problems for the 25 young women supported by our partner agency, Fondo Guadalupe Musalem.

Thanks to a proposal from CANFRO’s board president Sandra Thomson, an NGO called Future Crunch, which supports small charities using science and technology to make a difference, donated more than \$90,000 Mexican pesos (\$5500 CAD), enough to buy 25 tablets, one per student. These will allow each student to attend school and participate in workshops on topics such as dating violence, sexual and reproductive health, leadership, and human rights. Throughout the pandemic Fondo Guadalupe Muselem has been helping with the connectivity issues, covering the cost of data and phone cards for the girls. With this support the mentoring program continues unabated, and another cohort of eight girls will graduate high school this June.

And further, several of the young women in university have graduated with degrees this year.



### **The School Sponsorship Project**

The 49 students who CANFRO donors support through the School Sponsorship Project have seen major disruptions in their educational life, as they have had to make do with schooling on television, or online via computers or cellphones. In-person schooling is not expected to begin before August. Dra. Martha Canseco, president of our partner agency The Centre of Hope for Children (CEI), describes some of the home learning situations as “very sad and difficult,” with some children facing child abuse, sexual abuse, gender violence and alcohol abuse. CANFRO is working with Dra. Martha and our US partner, Oaxaca Streetchildren Grassroots, on a plan to provide ongoing psychological services to CEI students and their families, either in person if conditions allow, or by Zoom, using facilities at the Centre. A US donor has pledged to cover the cost of a psychologist two half-days per week for six months, and CANFRO is committed to paying for at least a third half-day per week.

Even though in-person schooling is cancelled students were happy to receive their usual two pairs of shoes and school supplies. In some cases, they still needed to pay inscription fees. Sponsorship donations covered these costs and will assist with the much-needed psychological services now being planned.

On a happier note, to everyone’s great relief, four staff members at CEI who had become ill with Covid-19 have all recovered.



*The families of children at the Centre of Hope of Children receive despensas of food during the pandemic, paid for by generous CANFRO donors*

### **The Food Project**

The Food Project continues to provide families of students at the Centre of Hope for Children (CEI) with *despensas*, packages of essential supplies (rice, beans, cooking oil, etc). This new focus for The Food Project began when the pandemic prevented CEI from providing in-person daily nutritious meals for students. Since the launch of the despensas in April 2020, CANFRO donors, first-time donors among them, have made 82 donations. Two special donors have sent funds multiple times. CANFRO donor generosity has also included four rounds of cash gifts to help the families of CANFRO students supplement their despensas and to help them cover other basic costs. The first gift was in May 2020, and the latest came at Easter. Funds for these cash gifts came from our generous sponsors--extra special people because under CRA regulations, CANFRO could not provide them with tax receipts for these donations.

The livelihoods of our students' families have been brutally disrupted by the pandemic. CANFRO support for the despensas will continue while the community need is there.

## **The Tutor Project**

Tutoring, workshops, and counseling for more than 100 high school students have continued thanks to the work of our partner agency, The Oaxaca Learning Centre (TOLC), throughout the pandemic. TOLC staff have loaned phones and equipment and helped pay for data to support remote learning, so that students can meet with their university student tutors online or by phone.

TOLC has been able to arrange free health services for its students and has been involved in distributing free food to families. TOLC is also planning for the post-pandemic future, by undertaking a construction project that will add a second floor to the building on Calle Murguía it owns. This additional space will eliminate the increasing cost of rent elsewhere, and will include a large workshop room, consulting and computer rooms, bathrooms, and a terrace.

Support for youth through the pandemic and beyond: this is the current phase of a program that has helped young people, many from low-income families, to graduate high school and proceed to higher education, for more than 15 years. However, so far in 2021, CANFRO donations to this project are down. Please contribute if you can.



*Regional coordinators of Libros para Pueblos receive much-needed laptops paid for by generous donors.*

## **The Book Project**

The global pandemic has not stopped our Oaxaca partner, Libros Para Pueblos, from getting books and training materials to the 70 libraries they serve. In a normal year, library managers would collect their yearly supply of books at the LPP annual conference, which became a virtual training event this year due to the pandemic. This year, LPP staff and helpers sorted the 130 new titles and training DVDs and are currently scheduling visits and deliveries one on one. Special fundraising has enabled LPP to purchase five of nine computers needed by regional coordinators to allow them to work remotely with the staff

and libraries they oversee. Some libraries have been totally closed by the pandemic; others have been able to provide limited service; some library coordinators have taken books directly to the children.

LPP continues to seek donor support for library sponsorship and technology. Your generosity will be greatly appreciated; access to books changes lives.

### **The Speech and Signing Therapy Project**

Our partner agency in Oaxaca, CORAL, would normally be conducting hearing tests in remote villages, identifying children in need of help. Sadly, the pandemic has brought that work to a halt. However, the Speech and Signing Therapy Project continues to provide educational and emotional support to families already registered prior to the pandemic, via Facebook, Zoom, emails and phone calls. In March, CORAL presented a new course on *Mexican Sign Language (LSM) in a Health Context*, targeted to health professionals. Learning basic LSM grammar, structure, and relevant expressions will help health providers improve care for deaf patients who experience many difficulties when going to doctors or hospitals. The course has been very well received, especially in the context of the pandemic, and there is interest in a follow-up course.

A particular challenge at this time is that children cannot lip read when people are wearing masks. However, the Project remains strong thanks to the generosity of our donors and the “can-do-spirit” of staff and students. Post-pandemic, donations will be needed for psychological counselling that parents of deaf children require as well as for the children themselves.