



onlyachild@aol.com

PO Box 990885 Boston, MA 02199

<http://www.onlyachild.org>

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To the many who have cared,

All of our residents turn to us for the opportunity to better themselves. In material terms, they have come from next to nothing. To simply describe them as being poor does not begin to do justice to the realities they have known. Hunger was a given. Despite the fact that they have likely come from large families, their homes were impossibly small and modest. In some cases, to this day, candles provide light after dark and running water is a hit and miss occurrence.

Poverty to such an extreme not only restricts life in the present, it substantially limits future possibilities, as well. Almost without exception, the education of our youths took place in public schools which often times function as government run daycare rather than qualified institutions of learning. Any parent with the means sends their children to independent, accredited schools. Our residents' parents seldom have the means, as the cost of such an education is expensive by Guatemalan standards. That is why they turn to us.

Their previous education, whatever it may have been, often leaves our new residents ill-prepared to enter the level of institutions that Only A Child has always used. For that reason, in addition to offering a traditional middle and high school education, we make use of supplementary schools to bring them up to speed and complement their education in ways that will better offer them the possibility of a secure future, including university level studies.

The school year follows the traditional calendar year in Guatemala. In January:

- Marvin returned to school to finish a 13-month program at an English language academy, *CIAV*
- Bryan entered his freshman year at high school
- Agustín entered 11th grade. He also began a 10-month course at a computer programming institution, *IMB-PC*
- Erick began studying for the second round of entrance exams given by the *University of San Carlos*. He also completed a 3-month course geared to prepare students for the exam - at *Alenro* - a mathematics and accounting academy.
- Giovany continued preparations to take the first round of entrance exams at the *University San Carlos* while completing the same 3-month course as Erick at *Alenro*. He also enrolled for a 10-month mathematics course at *San Carlos*, designed to prepare students to take the entrance exam
- José resumed his studies at seventh grade level after a 5 year absence from school. At 14, he left school at his parents urging and began working in nearby fields to help provide for his younger siblings.

- After graduating from a nursing program at the top of his class, Pablo began studying at a high school featuring a program that focuses on future careers in the medical field
- Jonathan entered our program and, like Agustín, began his studies at *IMP-PC*. In addition, he entered a 10-month mathematics course at *Alenro*, as he is also preparing to take the entrance exam at the *University of San Carlos*

The case of Jonathan well illustrates why our work remains vital. Like several of his housemates, Jonathan was the oldest child in a large family and comes from an area where, as he tactfully put it, resources were in short supply. Nevertheless he attended a modest independent institution and graduated from high school before joining Only A Child. Jonathan possesses great intelligence and a voracious appetite for learning. His passion is reading, his preference for international classics. At present, he is immersed in Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

Jonathan also displays an admirable understanding of the English language. He is largely self-taught as the English he learned at school was minimal. Much of what he has learned came to him via online courses. He is also well versed in a considerable variety of other topics. Impressed, I asked him if his former school had provided him with such a fine education. Jonathan responded in the negative while resisting the urge to smile, but added that a few of his former teachers had shown special interest in his education. I responded by saying that it was likely they had observed his natural ability as well as his desire to learn. Jonathan responded in the affirmative, no longer able to suppress a humble, somewhat embarrassed smile.

Off and on throughout the year, we have Christian missionary teams visit our program, our carpentry shop to be exact. The first team of the year came to us not long after Jonathan's arrival. After giving a presentation on our history and our work, I ask each of our residents to speak for themselves, telling who they are, where they come from, why they are with us and lastly, what they hope to accomplish during their tenure at Only A Child. I often serve as their translator, as needed. When Jonathan's turn to speak arrived, he removed a carefully folded piece of paper from his pocket, methodically opened it and then, in a soft but sure voice began to read a letter he had prepared for the team.

Hi,

I'm Jonathan. I have five brothers and sisters. I am the oldest among them. I come from Totoncapán. Totoncapán is here (at this moment Jonathan moved to a map on the wall and indicated the location of his home town). I want to be an engineer in systems, but I would like to improve my English before starting at the university. I hope one day to help other people like you do with me. I love to read, I like to exercise and I love to study. And I have a little sister that I love very much. Thank you for your visit.

No translation was needed. Jonathan had repeatedly practiced reading the letter to himself the previous night. Everyone present marveled not only at what Jonathan had undertaken, but also at the quality of his execution. He spoke with minimal trace of an accent.

Building and sustaining a donor base remains challenging. The two primary fundraising obstacles relate to our location outside the U.S. and the relatively small number of youths that we serve. In addition, the recent occurrence of an unusually large number of natural disasters in a concentrated period of time adversely affected charitable organizations, including Only A Child. Understandably, many people focused their charitable giving in response to the great hardship resulting from the disasters.

Moreover, the exchange rate for the dollar has fallen and remained low under the current administration. During the past 12 months, we have had to exchange an additional \$4,000 to obtain the same value of Guatemalan currency that was needed to meet the same budget during the previous year. This translates to a major loss of income.

Offering our residents a quality education remains a priority, but it is ever more challenging to provide for their basic needs. Jonathan's circumstances at home prevented him from continuing his studies at University level. If not for Only A Child, Jonathan's intelligence and potential would likely have remained unfulfilled. The same can be said of his companions.

If our funding does not rebound soon, we will be faced with making changes to our program on a structural level, eliminating services we have offered since opening a home nearly 2 decades ago. Our annual spring fundraiser is at hand, April 8th. Never has the need for it to be successful been so urgent. To those of you who have intended to support Only A Child but have not of late, I ask that you do so without further delay. To everyone I humbly say, if you continue to care about our work; if you believe that our mission reaching out to young lives in search of a future still matters, please make supporting our event a priority.

Thank you.

May God bless.

George

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P.S. This May will mark the 25th anniversary of the publishing of *Giovany's Story*, the Boston Globe article detailing the life and brutal death of one boy struggling to survive in the streets of Guatemala City. It was *Giovany's Story* that compelled me to begin this work. This year's fundraiser will take place on a new day (Sunday), April 8th and a new time (2 PM). The location is also new, the Watertown Sons of Italy, 520 Pleasant St. - just a few doors down from Russo's produce market. For more info, please visit our web site at www.onlyachild.org. I look forward to seeing you there.