STARFISH

Annual Report
2014
Mission: Starfish unlocks and maximizes the potential of young women to lead transformational change.

Vision: Empowerment, equality, and opportunity for all
The progress of the year is best personified by Concepción Lacan, one of the almost 80 young graduates of the program who is now part of the Starfish mentor team. Concepción (or “Chonita” as she is called) enters the office laughing, wearing a purple huipil full of embroidered birds—characteristic of Santiago Atitlán. The strong colors are representative of Chonita’s power and grace.

Today, Chonita is a mentor in Starfish. She is tasked with stewarding the education and empowerment of 14 girls in middle school. “Success is achieved when you believe in yourself. Education makes you a different person—you think, act, and understand things differently. I have achieved much more than I ever could have imagined. My vision has changed,” Chonita says. “My goal as mentor for 14 Girl Pioneers is to unlock that same belief in themselves.”

Letter from In-Country Director Norma Baján

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“Yesterday I had a meeting with the Girl Pioneers. We are planning to start a small business,” she says as she sits down, crosses her legs and moves her arms enthusiastically. “We are thinking of raising chickens; it will be an interesting experience,” she says, tucking a few loose hairs behind her ear.

“As a child I wanted to be a teacher,” Chonita describes, “but my mom told me school was not worth the investment. That made me very angry.” Chonita’s single mother never attended school, yet thanks to individual perseverance Chonita is now in her third year of university. “It was not easy,” says Chonita. “The criticism of my neighbors and my family were constant.” Chonita’s father passed away when she was a child, so daily economic hardships also represented major obstacles.

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Letter from In-Country Director Norma Baján (con’t.)

Some alarming facts about Santiago, Chonita’s hometown:

- Of every 100 students who complete elementary school, only 17 will continue to middle school. Fewer than 13 will reach high school. For Mayan girls, these numbers are even lower.
- Of the economically active young population, only 10 percent make minimum wage or above.
- According to a recent report on Santiago, the primary factors that trigger violence are lack of employment, alcoholism, and lack of education.
- Almost half of Mayan girls are pregnant by the time they are 18.

Our challenges for 2015 are driven by our four goals that we outline in this annual report. Several of our main strategies include:

- Fostering a strong network with other organizations and companies to connect Girl Pioneers with viable employment opportunities;
- Creating and sustaining university access;
- Identifying more and diverse leadership opportunities; and
- Continuing to recognize the fundamental role that each family plays to reach our goals.

On behalf of the Starfish team in Guatemala, thanks to each of you for your support. We are honored by your partnership in unlocking the infinite impact of the lives of Girl Pioneers, their families and communities, and our world.

Norma Baján,
*In-Country Director*
On a recent visit to a mentorship session with the Perlas de Mar (Pearls of the Sea), I had the honor of witnessing the development of ambition and grit in real time. Led by a powerhouse mentor, the lesson of the hour was “self-esteem.” As I listened to the girls speak about valuing their minds and bodies, it was clear that this was not new information they were learning, but rather a confirmation of what they already knew. They had no trouble answering questions about what they would do if and when they were presented with obstacles. These young women have been internalizing this message of self-worth since they began their journey with Starfish.

Writer Nicholas Kristof has said, “Talent is universal. Opportunity is not.” Starfish creates opportunity for hundreds of girls in an area with the greatest gender inequity in our hemisphere. By changing the conditions under which these girls live and operate, we change the trajectory of their potential. This transformation is profound, and it happens within just one generation, within each girl. The ripple effects will continue for generations to come.

As we look ahead, the opportunity to unlock her infinite impact is even greater. We see the direct impact of the Starfish community—the empowerment of these young women and the strength of their dreams. We have shifted our measurement of success from simply how many young women will access the program to how far each young woman can go. With the development of the Starfish Impact School, they will have the resources to compete on a level that is commensurate with their dreams.

Starfish creates agents of change who are empowered to build a new future for their communities. They have choices that were not available to previous generations. Lessons in persistence, grit, and ambition are no longer just nice to have. They are moral imperatives. As the girls say in a song they sing:

*Soy perseverante. Levanto mi voz.*
I am perseverant. I raise my voice.

Note from President Rebecca Weaver

On a recent visit to a mentorship session with the Perlas de Mar (Pearls of the Sea), I had the honor of witnessing the development of ambition and grit in real time. Led by a powerhouse mentor, the lesson of the hour was “self-esteem.” As I listened to the girls speak about valuing their minds and bodies, it was clear that this was not new information they were learning, but rather a confirmation of what they already knew. They had no trouble answering questions about what they would do if and when they were presented with obstacles. These young women have been internalizing this message of self-worth since they began their journey with Starfish.

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### Highlights

![Image of three women]

Starfish is grateful to the following organizations and thought-leaders for their technical support in 2014:

- **Dr. Beth Osnes/Chelsea Hackett** Empowered Female Voice
- **JUCONI Mexico** Positive communication with/within families
- **The Trauma Resource Institute** Enhancing individual resilience
- **Association for Leadership Guatemala** Executive leadership
- **Doug and Jeannie Amidon** Dynamic teaching techniques
- **KIPP Houston** Articulating and measuring BIG goals

### Trendsetting Trajectories

Each Girl Pioneer’s path is dynamic and often without precedent. Throughout 2014, there were several inspiring examples of what happens when Girl Pioneer talent meets opportunity:

- **Mayra** represented the international girls’ education movement at She’s the First’s NYC Mentor Breakfast event. Mayra also appeared in *forbes.com*.
- **Francisca** was elected president of her university class.
- **Elida** administered a scholarship program for girls in the remote area of Ixil, Guatemala.
- **Ana Teresa** was recognized as a #GirlHero by the Malala Fund.
- **Lissette** graduated from high school. She is one of several from families in which neither parent ever attended school.
- **Brenda** completed her training at the Global Press Institute.

![Photo Credit: Charles G. Cannon & Laurie Rae Baxter]

![Photo Credit: Kate Lord]

Innovation

Starfish is fortunate to have generous partners that fuel our ability to constantly improve. Starfish staff members take these powerful insights and attune them to our unique context. Once proven in our program, these tools are then shared with other organizations throughout Guatemala. Starfish Girl Pioneer Yuri and her parents at her high school graduation ceremony.

Pictured: Mayra speaks at the She’s the First Mentor Breakfast in New York City. The breakfast was attended by journalist Sheryl WuDunn (left), Jennifer Buffet, top lawyer Nicole Wong, and fashion designer Nanette Lepore.
Starfish defines impact as being **empowered to empower**. Our impact is measured by the trajectory of our graduates (totaling 78 at the end of 2014). Progress towards this vision is measured via our four organizational goals:

1. **Her economic autonomy** — An annual salary of $3,150 USD indicates she is out of poverty, legally employed, and mobile.
   
   Progress: Of the Girl Pioneers in the graduating classes of 2011 and 2012, 70 percent are earning at or above this level (middle class), indicating that the cycle of poverty has been broken.

2. **Her lifelong learning** — 15 years of formal schooling means that she, on average, has an associate degree or equivalent thereof, and is prepared for the 21st century.
   
   Progress: Of the Girl Pioneers in the graduating classes of 2011 and 2012, over half are enrolled in the university (compared to less than 1 percent for Mayan women nationally).

3. **Her family on her terms** — An average marrying age of 26 demonstrates that she has truly chosen to start her family.
   
   Progress: 96 percent of Starfish graduates have delayed starting their families and are on track to reach this goal (compared to almost 50 percent of their peers who have a child by age 18).

4. **Her leadership** — Is she leading positive change? We measure her formal influence via her participation in civic groups, offices she holds, change she leads at work, etc.

   Mayan women represent approximately a quarter of the population, yet they have 1.8 percent representation in the national congress. Graduates are on their way. Several work with women-focused social impact organizations and primary schools. One is the first female to serve on her community council. Another is president of her university class.

Empowering other organizations

Starfish strives to empower other organizations by sharing our proven tools and methodologies. In 2014, Starfish formally trained 5 other organizations, empowering each to empower youths throughout Guatemala. Since 2012, over 15 programs have received formal training from Starfish.
As one of the first Starfish graduates, Elsa (age 19) has blazed an unprecedented path towards fulfilling her potential and creating economic stability for herself and her family. The fourth oldest of 12 siblings in a family with little income, Elsa wasn’t sure how she would continue her education or find opportunities in her small community (that does not have a high school). Both Elsa and her parents are “early adopters” to the idea of education (her mother has only one year of schooling). A combination of her parents’ encouragement and her own determination to move forward led her to discover Starfish, and seven years later that investment is paying off.

Elsa is among the few in her community to graduate from high school. After completing a six-month paid internship at Mercado Global—a nearby organization supporting local women—through Starfish’s New Horizons program, Elsa, through hard work, pulled off every intern’s dream: she was hired for a formal position. She now works in the accounting department to support the critical everyday functions of the organization. Elsa is happy and grateful to be able to maintain a job she enjoys while making enough money to support her family.

Of equal importance, she is now a positive outlier in her community. Elsa’s success proves to other families the value of pursuing education for their daughters.

Elsa, Girl Pioneer

Elsa at work at Mercado Global, a women’s cooperative that empowers women to be agents of change.

Photo Credit: Baxter Cannon
“I had the fortunate opportunity to visit Starfish in the summer of 2014 and came away inspired on multiple levels. By tagging along on a home visit, I was able to see the deep connections between the mentor, the Starfish participant, and her family. There was a palpable sense of trust and commitment in the home to do whatever it takes to help the Starfish participant succeed. Hearing the mother of the Starfish participant say that ‘I just want my child to have more opportunities and a better life than my own’ left me humbled by the work that Starfish is doing.” -- Ken Goeddeke, Head of Schools KIPP Houston

Finances

Starfish Audited Statement of Activities 2014

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Functional Expense Allocation as of September 30, 2014

- Administrative: 78%
- Fundraising: 11%
- Program (including grants received directly by Guatemala): 11%

Audited financial statements and IRS 990 forms available at: http://starfish-impact.org/financials/
Donors

Thank you to everyone who makes our mission possible. Your support helps each of our Girl Pioneers to realize their infinite impact.

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