

## President's report: AGM 2022

- Welcome all who are joining us, both physically and virtually, for the 2022 HELP Honduras AGM – thank you for your interest and support.
- A special welcome to Lurvin Avila and Reyna Cakix. Lurvin is the director for AYO, and Reyna is our educator of the non-governmental organization which is overseen by a Board of Honduran Rotarians. This group is our 'boots on the ground' in the markets and barrios in and around Tegucigalpa. They are passionate, hard working and dedicated to changing lives and making a difference in their country. They deliver programs and supervise our students as well as supporting their families. They ensure that our students have the very best chance to stay in school and succeed. We refer to them as 'staff'. Lurvin and Reyna have a presentation for us and will explain how the educational support has changed due to the pandemic this past year and provide some details on the breadth of programs offered.
- We have had a very successful year but the pandemic has continued to make things challenging for our Society. We have had to make changes to some of the things we would normally do to ensure that the program is properly monitored and then communicated to our sponsors.
- A number of these changes make the Society stronger.
- In the past, a team of Rotarians would head to Honduras in late January of every year and spend a week or more visiting the programs, taking pictures of the students to be enrolled, meeting with staff and doing a general auditing of the money we have sent to Honduras. But for the second year we were not able to travel to Honduras due to travel restrictions.
- Staff took the pictures of our enrolled students which were then sent to us. Heather and Richard worked on a different format for getting these out to sponsors. Most certificates and pictures were sent by email which made things much more efficient.
- We would normally have face to face meetings with the staff and the Rotarians in Honduras who oversee the program but this year we have had to do this virtually. We have had a number of ZOOM conference calls with them to better understand how the pandemic has affected the students we support and how we can best help them help the students be successful.
- As most of you know, children in Honduras must show up to enrol in school with a uniform, backpack, school books, supplies and shoes. The single moms who walk the streets selling slices of watermelon or have a tortilla stand making less than \$2.50/day cannot provide these so our sponsorship dollars pay for these items which allows our children to attend school. But as it did here and in the US the model for delivering education changed with the pandemic. Last year educational programs and learning opportunities went to online platforms. This meant that the support we were providing needed to change.

- Therefore, money which had in the past gone to backpacks, books, shoes, uniforms and supplies needed to be redirected to cell phones and data packages so that students could access the online courses that were being offered.
- This year, though, our Rotarian partners were unsure about what the school year would look like. Education could continue to be provided online, or schools might be opened and in session or there could be a blended set of opportunities. We needed to prepare and plan for a number of different possibilities. In the end the Ministry of Education decided to have a blended program with some in school days and some online education.
- We worked with our Rotarian partners and our AYO staff and came up with a budget that would provide some supplies as well as some limited data packages.
- Throughout this whole process, due to the diligence of AYO and the tenacity of our students we have been incredibly successful in keeping students connected to their education.
- This past year, the Director of AYO, Norma Chavez, retired. We are incredibly appreciative of the leadership that she provided to AYO over her tenure as Director. The Board of AYO decided to make Lurvin, who was our educator, the new director for AYO. They then hired Reyna as the new educator. She had been providing some English lessons to some of our students in the past couple of years. Reyna is translating the reports that we get from AYO into English and we are beginning to post these reports on our website which is going to allow our sponsors to get more details and clarity on the program more frequently. This is tremendous.
- When we traveled to Honduras in the past, we would look at the books, get receipts and generally ensure that the financials were in line. This past year, Heather, Chris and Mandy have done some incredible work with our AYO accountant to change the way the finances are reported. Now a financial report is provided to us quarterly and it allows for much greater detail and clarity on how the money is spent every quarter. We can be even more certain that the money is accounted for and going to where it was intended.
- All of the reporting and communicating with sponsors has meant that the paperwork or minutiae of the program has increased. We put out a call for help with this and we got a couple of individuals who have skills and have offered some of their time which has allowed us to divvy up some of the added jobs/responsibilities.
- The HELP directors have had a number of ZOOM conference calls and I want to thank them as they are so thoughtful and truly dedicated to this program. They have helped guide the Society carefully through these strange times.
- In the past I would have gotten around to visit a number of Rotary clubs and done presentations at their meetings. This past year I did a bit of that virtually which was less personal. We have

added a few new sponsors but lost more. I'm not sure how many visits I will be able to do in the next year so we need to do something different to get the information out to more people. I've put together a 5- minute presentation that Rotary clubs or service groups can use to introduce our program to their members. Currently it refers to D5080 as it was meant for the District Conference but I will make the small change which will ensure that it is suitable for all Rotary Clubs.

- Our sponsors have been incredibly generous, supportive and understanding. They have supported the program as well in these past two crazy years as they have in the past.
- I want to thank you all, and the many other sponsors that we have, for the support that you provide which helps to improve the life chances of the children we work with.

Respectfully submitted by

Michael Balahura, President, H.E.L.P. Honduras