Mobile Clinics to Better Health for Rural Guatemala

Guatemala

Lisa Convery

Organization type: nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector
Project Stage: Scaling
Budget: $50,000 - $100,000
Website: http://www.primerospasos.org
Health care  
Health education  
Indigenous cultures  
Rural development  
Vulnerable populations  
Youth development  
Volunteerism

Project Summary

Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?
While the nation of Guatemala does have a public health system, a combination of historical conflicts and a continuous cycle of poverty have left over one million residents without access to care. The number is disproportionately true for the rural regions, where only 19% of the population received medical attention prior to 2003. Outside of the city of Quetzaltenango, the Palajunoj Valley is a rural area of Guatemala with a population of 15,000 residents. Nearly 100% of the population is indigenous. According to the World Health Organization, 81% of the indigenous population in Guatemala lives in extreme poverty. Primeros Pasos works within the rural Palajunoj Valley serving ten local communities, providing not only curative health attention but also preventative health education.

Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!
Due to high levels of poverty, indigenous and rural communities are consistently left without access to health care. The public health system is often inaccessible in rural communities where individuals do not have the financial or transportation means to reach centers of care. Primeros Pasos has established a two-pronged program to best enable access to both health care and preventative health education. In addition to having an established clinic, where patients come, Primeros Pasos also runs a series of mobile clinics bringing medical care and preventative health education to isolated communities. A team of medical professionals and health educators visit each of the four most isolated communities on an annual basis to provide on-site medical care and education to the residents of these areas. This is designed to improve the quality of life of indigenous communities by providing access to quality health care and habit changing education.

Example: Walk us through a specific example(s) of how this solution makes a difference; include its primary activities.
A team of medical professionals and health educators go out into four different communities in the Palajunoj Valley annually as part of a series of mobile clinics, bringing health care and preventative health education to the residents of these areas. Each mobile clinic lasts approximately 4-5 days, depending on the size of the community. The clinics use each town's local elementary school as a center for operation. Serves two major purposes: first, it allows the mobile clinic to successfully reach the Palajunoj Valley's children, a target vulnerable population, and second, it utilizes the school because of the number of residents who will hear about the clinic through children and neighbors. This word of mouth over the first few days gives ample opportunity for residents to reach the school, a centralized point in their community, to receive care. As part of the visit, not only are patients seen by medical volunteers, but most basic medicines and treatments are included as part of the visit. A pharmaceutical inventory is kept by the medical staff who replenish needed medicines throughout the week. Mobile clinics are an opportunity to provide anti-parasite treatment to populations who might receive medical care no more than once a year otherwise. In 2011, Primeros Pasos began a parallel series of mobile dental clinics, providing extractions to patients suffering from acute dental pain and decay. As the only source of dental care in the Palajunoj Valley, Primeros Pasos is working to make sure that all Valley residents will have access to this important medical service.

Marketplace: Who else is addressing the problem outlined here? How does the proposed project differ from these approaches?
The Palajunoj Valley has a population of approximately 15,000. As of 2011, the Valley is now home to a government-sponsored Health Post. This post is staffed by one doctor and one nurse. Primeros Pasos provides two major services that the public health system cannot. Primeros Pasos houses between 6-12 medical students completing clinical rotations at any given time. With many more human resources, Primeros Pasos is able to complete these mobile clinics, bringing services directly to isolated communities. Additionally, walk-in patients seen in the clinic and also treated through the mobile clinics, pay a symbolic fee that includes medicine. The public health system charges no fee but also leave the patients to buy their own medicine, creating both a logistical and financial barrier to care.

Team

Founding Story
In 2002, medical students from Vanderbilt University came to the Palajunoj Valley to complete research on health in the Palajunoj Valley. The need for a reliable source of health care in the area became apparent. In 2004, Primeros Pasos was established to provide quality, affordable care to the residents of the area. Since its inception, the founders of Primeros Pasos realized the importance of partnering with the local school system as a way of reaching patients and increasing the community's trust in the clinic. In 2007, Primeros Pasos served 2,796 walk-in patients; In 2011, they...
served 3,768 walk-in patients. This increase speaks to the great need for medical services in the Palajunoj Valley and surrounding areas. Additionally, in 2009-2010 the Primeros Pasos staff realized that there were four communities who needed extra logistical support. The increase in patients served is a sign that mobile clinics are an effective way of successfully reaching patients in need of health care.

---

**Organization:**
Primeros Pasos

**About You**

**First Name**
Lisa

**Last Name**
Convery

**Twitter URL**

**Facebook URL**
http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Primeros-Pasos/7914146313

---

**About Your Organization**

**Organization Name**
Primeros Pasos

**Organization Country**
, QZ

**Country where this project is creating social impact**
, QZ

**How long has your organization been operating?**
More than 5 years

The information you provide here will be used to fill in any parts of your profile that have been left blank, such as interests, organization information, and website. No contact information will be made public. Please uncheck here if you do not want this to happen.

---

**Innovation**

**How long have you been in operation?**
Operating for more than 5 years

**Which of the following best describes the barrier(s) your innovation addresses? Choose up to two**

Access, Quality.

---

**Social Impact**

**Please describe the goal of your initiative; outline what you are trying to achieve**

Since its inception in 2002, Primeros Pasos has aimed to improve the quality of life of the rural communities of the Palajunoj Valley of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, through integrated health education programs and access to medical services. Primeros Pasos believes in the importance of preventative health education focused on changing health behaviors and empowering individuals to be informed patients alongside quality medical care. Over the last ten years, Primeros Pasos has expanded and modified its programs to improve both the quality of and access to the services provided. Mobile clinics are part of this continual improvement, increasing access to health care for the most isolated residents of the Valley. Mobile dental clinics are one of the newest innovations to achieve our mission.

**What has been the impact of your solution to date?**

Primeros Pasos has worked closely with the elementary school systems since 2002. Since 2002 the number of elementary school children seen either at the clinic or on-site in their schools has increased nearly three-fold from around 1,000 in 2002, to just under 3,000 in 2011. Mobile clinics are extremely important for reaching high numbers of students. In 2010, on average Primeros Pasos treated 66% of children registered within the school system. However, in mobile clinic communities this percentage increased up to 88% in the community of las Majadas. Additionally, general consults beyond the school children take place on these trips. In 2011, approximately 200 individuals, 5% of the total patients seen (outside of elementary school children), were from the four mobile clinic communities. Many of these patients will never come to the clinic. It is only through these clinics going out into the surrounding areas that these patients receive treatment.

**What is your projected impact over the next five years?**

Because of the rural nature of the Palajunoj Valley, Primeros Pasos would like to expand the mobile clinic program to be a regularly occurring program alongside the clinic. Rather than having the closer students come into the clinical area, we envision ourselves conducting most student visits within the elementary schools. Being on-site in the communities decreases the percentage of students who miss their annual health check through Primeros Pasos. Rather than carrying out one mobile clinic annually to each of the four isolated communities: Bella Vista, Las Majadas, Candelaria, and Tierra Colorada Alta, Primeros Pasos has the long-term goal of bringing medical care and health education to these communities.
What barriers might hinder the success of your project? How do you plan to overcome them?

The major difficulty that Primeros Pasos faces is securing the funding to carry out mobile clinics with more frequency. In addition to costs for medicine and equipment, mobile clinics require transportation and additional materials as they are not carried out within a clinic setting. In the next year, Primeros Pasos has the goal of researching and applying to two foundations or grants each month in order to secure increased, stable funding for clinical operations including the expansion of mobile clinics. Additionally, we will be soliciting specific funding for a pick up truck that will carry staff and supplies to communities.

Winning entries present a strong plan for how they will achieve and track growth. Identify your six-month milestone for growing your impact

Expand mobile dental clinics to all four communities as 2012, rather than just the two communities visited in 2011.

Identify three major tasks you will have to complete to reach your six-month milestone

Task 1
Do outreach about dental services in the new communities (Tierra Colorada Alta and Candelaria) for 2012.

Task 2
Secure funding for extra dental supplies and transportation costs.

Task 3
Train volunteers to assist with on-site patient intake and create information packets on dental care.

Now think bigger! Identify your 12-month impact milestone

Increase patients seen through mobile clinics in 2012 by 5% more than those seen in 2011.

Identify three major tasks you will have to complete to reach your 12-month milestone

Task 1
Assure funding for medicine and transportation through local and international grants.

Task 2
Publicize upcoming mobile clinics through community leaders including the school directors and community board members.

Task 3
Streamline patient process through coordination of administration and health educators.

Sustainability

Tell us about your partnerships

Primeros Pasos is funded through the Inter-American Health Alliance (IAHA), Change for Children, the GlobeMed at chapter at Georgetown University, and a number of individual donors. The clinic has partnerships with the local Universidad de San Carlos. We serve as a placements sight for fourth year medical students completing clinical rotations, seventh year dental students completing their practicum, and interns in social work and psychology. In the United States, Primeros Pasos partners with Vanderbilt, Virginia, Boston, Georgetown, and Emory Universities.

Are you currently targeting other specific populations, locations, or markets for your innovation? If so, where and why?

Primeros Pasos will be targeting the four most isolated communities within the Palajunoj Valley as the locations for mobile clinics, both medical and dental. Primeros Pasos’ mission is to serve the needs of the Palajunoj Valley and therefore will be staying within those geographical confines. The communities have been selected based on geographical inaccessibility, keeping in mind that the mobile clinics program is intended to increase access to health care and preventative health education to populations in rural Guatemala who will have difficulty arriving at the clinic itself.

What type of operating environment and internal organizational factors make your innovation successful?

By staying within the Palajunoj Valley and working closely with community leaders and within the communities themselves, particularly by carrying out the mobile clinics in the local elementary schools, Primeros Pasos has built up the trust and confidence of the Valley communities. Our relationship with universities both within Guatemala and the United States provides a steady stream of medical students and other volunteers which allows the clinic to carry out the various programs all of which rely on the human and financial resources that the volunteers bring with them. Mobile clinics, both dental and medical, provide important learning tools to students and volunteers and bring needed services to isolated communities in the Palajunoj Valley.

Please elaborate on any needs or offers you have mentioned above and/or suggest categories of support that aren’t specified within the list

Primeros Pasos is always looking to build up mutually beneficial partnerships with other NGOs and organizations. We are looking for talented individuals to support the clinic in a number of ways including grant writing, statistical analysis, website design, and translation as well as on-site volunteers to implement our various programs.

Source URL: https://www.changemakers.com/innovations4health/entries/mobile-clinics-better-health-rural-guatemala#comment-0