

Magical
Classroom
Strategic
Visioning
Plan

2017



Organizational
Profile and
Projections
for 2017

The Issue

Did you know that more than half of Guatemalan children don't enter a classroom for the first time until the age of seven? By then, they already find themselves at the tail-end of their formative years for cognitive development, making the task of successfully completing the first grade far more daunting than it should be. Children that fail the first grade are far more likely to abandon their studies prior to completing even a primary school education, severely limiting their opportunities later on in life. In Guatemala, kids that have attended preschool have proven to be far more successful in completing the first grade than their peers. You may find yourself asking 'Why is it that that so many children don't attend preschool then?' and the answer can largely be summed up in one word: access (or lack thereof).

Due to its mountainous terrain, Guatemala is an incredibly fragmented country with countless small towns located several hours from the nearest urban center where opportunities for higher education - middle school and up in many cases- exist. There simply is a shortage of certified preschool teachers near these rural outposts which combined with the fact that preschool enrollment isn't obligatory makes it incredibly challenging for the government to staff preschool classrooms throughout the year. The result: 27% of kids throughout the country deserted their studies and/or failed the first grade in 2015. We at Magical Classroom have spent years searching for solutions to overcome the logistical challenges that have traditionally kept rural children at a perpetual disadvantage when it comes to schooling and future success.



Our Mission

Our mission is to demonstrate that it is possible to impact with the same program both academic performance and nutrition of all the children in Guatemala at that critical 0-6 age, and that universal preschool is possible and very affordable if done with entrepreneurial youth facilitators.

An idea is born

Even though we're set to begin our fourth year of classes, the genesis of our program dates even further back. Our sister organization, *Let's be Ready* spent the previous eight years training unemployed graduated teachers using a preschool curriculum divergent from the traditional 'banking-style' model prevalent in government classrooms and giving them essential classroom supplies. These teachers were then paired with organized communities in semi-rural areas in need of preschool coverage. During this experience, the leadership team of *Let's Be Ready* realized that while they had enjoyed positive results in their partner communities, there were still an untold number of remote communities without convenient access to graduated teachers. From that realization, the seeds for Magical Classroom were planted.

The Solution

With the help of our local partners, we identify local youth (typically ages 16-24) in rural communities whom possess both a spirit for community development and a passion for working with children to become preschool facilitators. After an intensive training session, these facilitators go on to lead daily preschool classes in their very communities using our proprietary guided curriculum that has been specially adapted for rural application. This curriculum relies heavily on using natural and recycled materials rather than expensive store-bought ones, helping keep both costs down while also helping manage trash in the community – a huge problem throughout the country. Easy to follow and dynamic, our curriculum leans heavily on participative activities and crafts that spark our children's imagination in ways not typically seen in Guatemalan schools. Our students not only partake in dynamic activities linked to that day's desired learning outcome, but also are read one of our carefully selected children's books and listen to our imagination-provoking interactive audio capsules each and every day. Having an easily-understood guided curriculum and capable facilitators allows us to do all of this in just two hours' classroom time – allowing our facilitators to work, study or tend to their families after finishing class.

While each facilitator sets off to work in their own community following our annual training where the entire team comes together, they are never entirely on their own throughout the year. Now more than ever, we strive to accompany rather than supervise our facilitators. Be it monthly get-togethers with their closest peers, hosting occasional parent workshops in their communities, and the various scheduled visits from our administrative team, our facilitators are given the right amount of tools to feel empowered and be successful not only in their classrooms, but in other areas of their lives as well. Each

facilitator receives a modest monthly stipend, which for many has served as a push toward pursuing their own educational and professional goals. At Magical Classroom, we get a great amount of satisfaction from knowing that we are helping serve two different generations at once: our students whom are the future and our youth facilitators who are the *present*.



Then to now: Watershed moments over the years

Since the first iteration of Magical Classroom back in 2014, our program has undergone many changes – some small, some quite big- but all of them have been made to help improve the efficacy and overall integrity of our program. Each and every one of these changes came about organically as a result of our process which places a high emphasis on listening to facilitator feedback and coming up with smart, practical solutions as quickly as possible. From refocusing our efforts to working with the most rural communities underserved by both the government and non-profit programs, to biting the bullet and deciding to revamp and breathe new life into an essential but once under-performing program component, to ditching an old school and incredibly cumbersome delivery strategy in favor of practical new tech solutions, we’ve shown time and again just how seriously we take striving to get better each and every year.

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4 (proposed)
Curriculum Strategy	Activity guide loosely tied to meandering audio capsules.	Activity guide with additional reading activities. Original audios still being used.	Added simple, effective materials (bottle caps, etc.) promoted use of word walls and visual stimulation. Completely revamped audios.	Increased emphasis on facilitator feedback. Added natural materials specific to each region. Greater opportunity for facilitator participation in curriculum designing.
Audio length, delivery	20 minutes. Listened to in one sitting. Lifeplayers.	20 minutes but now broken up into 4-5 minute segments throughout the week. Lifeplayers + introduction to Bluetooth speakers for some.	La Valija y La Cobija. 5-6 minutes. Delivered exclusively using tablet and Bluetooth speakers.	Unchanged.
Key areas of focus	Values, ethics. Storytelling.	Concentrated effort to link existing curriculum materials (scripts, guides) to CNB learning outcomes to ensure credibility.	Continued pursuit to meet CNB learning outcomes. More emphasis on reading, vocab, numbers, shapes, comparisons, letters.	Greater focus on mathematics. Fighting child malnutrition.
# of weeks covered	20	20+	30+	35+
Number of teachers	18	14	30	24+
Population served	Primarily urban w/some rural	No longer in urban populations (San Juan aside). Model group in Chiantla added.	Added coastal group, return to Lake Atitlán. Still rural.	Withdrew unfunded classrooms in Totonicapán and Colomba. Stable numbers in Reu and Huehue. Pilot (#2) with Starfish in Sololá (3 teachers, 3 months) and 3 teachers sponsored by Common Hope in

	Sacatepéquez.			
Targeted community partners	Local libraries, community radio leaders	Community libraries, local and reputable NGOs.	Open-minded to new types of partners so long as local connections maintained.	Parent engagement is central focus for the year. Parent engagement workshops once a month viewed as primary vehicle to support new nutrition component of program and keep support, attendance numbers steady throughout the year.
Supervision model	Train, visit frequently a la LBR (in theory). Reality: zero supervision, follow-up	3 visits during the year. Observation of classroom behavior and basic evaluation of student improvement. Travel intensive.	Increased phone call communication. Fewer trips in field.	No longer depend on one central coordinator, will have regional community coordinators to respond more quickly throughout the year. CC's will also lead parent workshops in local communities.
Defining characteristic	Despite lack of communication and teacher resources, the program was universally positively viewed.	Tightened curriculum. Improved user experience and communication w/teachers. Added emphasis on daily reading. Exploration into tablet, Bluetooth technology.	Full use of tablets. Huge and successful training. Greater emphasis on quality of teaching. Car accident was a major setback, but ultimately the program is in good shape.	Solidify the base: Improved tablets (Amazon Fire), Community Coordinators as intermediary support, nutritional program for better student performance and parent engagement, workshops for better parent support throughout the year are all to help get us on more solid ground and better prime us for expansion which has taken a backset this year.

Going Rural

Back in 2014, we weren't entirely sure whom exactly we needed to be serving and how to best deliver the program. While our founder's original intention was to reach the most rural pockets of the country that due to logistical challenges could not reasonably be served by our sister program *Let's Be Ready*, the composition of our classrooms during that 2014 pilot hardly reflected a focus on rural areas. After an end of the year analysis that valued facilitator feedback and constructive criticism, we quickly discovered that our curriculum and instruction model worked best in rural communities completely devoid of competing preschool programs. Attendance, effectiveness of the audio curriculum, and community support were all found to be much higher in the few rural classrooms that we had at that time. During this time we also learned that non-certified teachers were far more likely to correctly use our curriculum as instructed than graduated teachers with pre-existing experience. From then on out we withdrew from our urban/semi-rural classrooms and began to place a higher priority on working in areas with the greatest need for our services.



An Overhauled Curriculum

Following our second school year in 2015, we learned while the guided activity portion of our curriculum was performing well in our more rural classrooms, we were still having trouble getting our desired results out of the interactive audio capsules which were supposed to be essence of the program at the time. After making tweaks around the edges, we still were still unsatisfied with the performance of the audios and found ourselves forced to make a decision: scrap them entirely from the program and change our identity on-the-fly or cut ties with the original authors/creators and hand over the keys to experts better suited create an audio

component more in-synch with our activity manual? We chose the latter option and have been incredibly pleased with the results. With the help of our friends at the storytelling/mobile library outfit from Xela at *La Valija y La Cobija* and their years of television and radio experience in children's programming, we made the decision to invest in completely re-doing our audio curriculum before class began in 2016. The results: Better sonic quality, shorter yet far more engaging and attractive capsules that are more clearly linked to our established desired learning outcomes as laid out in our activity manual, greatly improved student interest and fact retention, and a return to a the whimsical, creative and imagination-provoking core of our program that we could all feel proud of.

In sidestep with our decision to overhaul the interactive audios, we made it "company policy" to place a high level importance on user feedback and subsequently developing intelligent and practical solutions as soon as possible. By creating program protocol centered on listening to criticism and holding team-discussions, we hoped to create a program that was as self-correcting and innovative as possible. At this same time we began to empower our Curriculum Developer, Lucy Díaz, and incorporate her into as many of our visioning discussions as possible. The program soon became a reflection of Lucy and her extensive experience and feel for the teaching profession, when previously she was held back by previous staff that was reluctant to incorporate feedback into their work. Soon our culture became centered on seeking out change rather than contentment; this has remained one of our core values ever since.



Equipment Meltdown – A Practical Change to High-Tech

While all the core components and values of our program rounding into form, the equipment that we were using to deliver the program to our students and teachers was continually failing us. During those first two years of operations, we were using Life Player radios – bulky, Mp3 capable radios that could either be charged via wind-up crank, a solar charger or a direct electric charger. The ability to charge without electricity was conceptually appealing to us at the start, but the defects of the actual apparatus proved to be too great to overcome. With radios breaking down left and right, no local repairmen familiar with the product, and no way to quickly receive more units (they had shipped from China and Africa), we found ourselves forced to look at other options. We soon landed on using tablets and Bluetooth speakers as a way to replace both the Life Players and our activity guides which we had been printing up until that point. Switching to tablets allowed us to make our activity guide more image-heavy and therefore more helpful to facilitators, and also permitted us to make as many changes as we wanted throughout the year without having to reprint the entire thing. The tablet/speaker combo is the same price as the Life Player, but with a local warranty included which has proven to be very important to us moving forward.

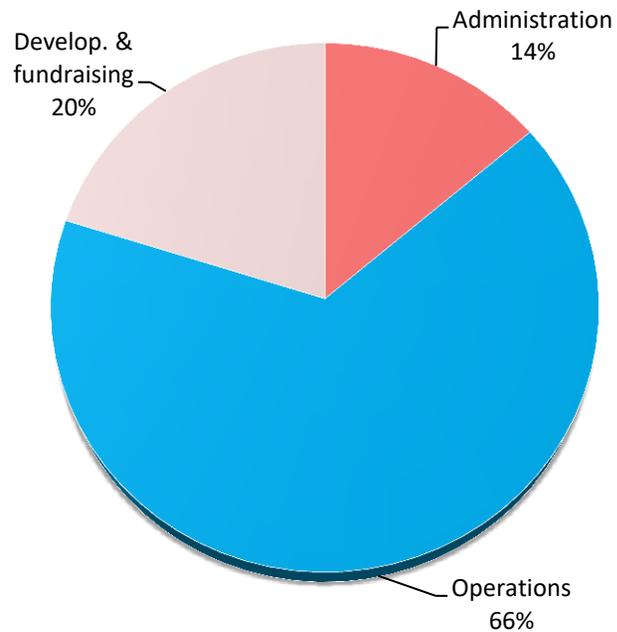
Our target population today

Magical Classroom was created to serve rural Guatemalan communities seeking to better prepare children ages 4-6 for success in the first grade and beyond. Our first priority is to work in communities currently without access to government-sponsored preschool coverage, but with fewer such communities each year, we will also serve similarly rural areas where a high number of preschool-eligible children currently are not enrolled in a pre-existing preschool program. High costs of required school supplies, enrollment cut-offs (many schools won't receive children younger than five years old) because of overcrowding, etc.), and a lack of awareness regarding the importance of early childhood education amongst rural families all play roles in preventing children from receiving the preparation that they need. By working directly with parents and community leaders, we're able to reach many of these children whom otherwise would be at a great disadvantage by the time they reach the first grade.

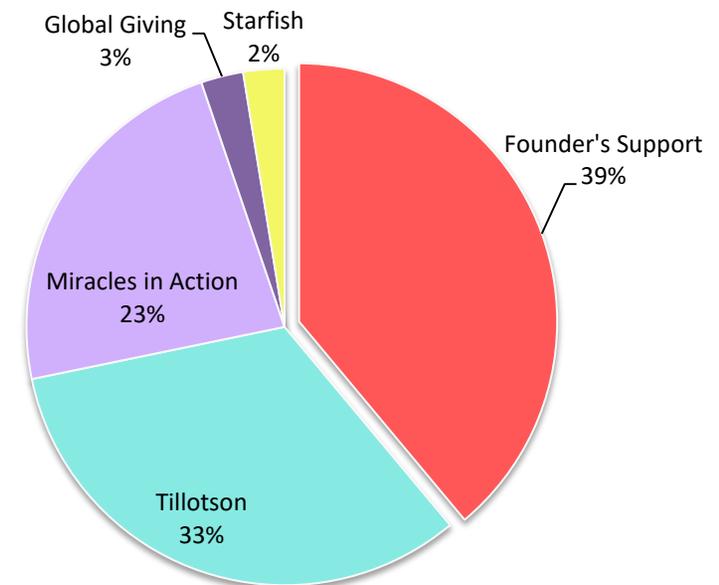


2016 Financial Summary

Expense Breakdown



Funding Profile



Cost per Classroom (Program-wide)

\$ 1,674.65

Approx. cost per Student

\$ 128.82

Accomplishments from 2016

With the help of our amazing partners, we were able to more than double our coverage in less than year, growing from a modest twelve teachers working in seven different communities to a total of 26 facilitators based in 17 different communities this past year. Thanks to the efforts of these 26 facilitators a whopping 260 children are now prepared to be successful in elementary school. What a change!

Numbers aside, here are some of the other accomplishments from this past year that we're proud of:

An enhanced and more robust curriculum: The first order of the business last year was enhancing solidifying certain aspects of our guided curriculum in an effort to provide a more integrated and practical learning experience for both our students and facilitators alike. With the help of our friends at *La Valija y La Cobija*, we were able to incorporate the previous two years of teacher feedback to completely revamp the audio capsules used every day in the classroom. With the help of these two talented actresses that double as early child education experts, we were able to breathe new and much-needed life into a crucial program component that was previously failing to meet our admittedly high expectations. Now our students and facilitators are accompanied on a daily basis by the eccentric Señora Panda and her friend Karen, with whom they partake in entertaining adventures designed to help the teacher achieve his/her daily desired daily learning outcome while also fine-tuning the listening and imaginative abilities of our students. During our many conversations with all of our facilitators throughout the year we are happy to announce that the addition of Señora Panda and Karen has been an undeniable success and has now become a proud hallmark of our curriculum.

A common-sense leap to high-tech solutions: The strength of the program has long been our diverse curriculum and our ability to adapt for use in rural communities, but for the longest time we weren't always sure how to best deliver our materials to facilitators in such a way that permitted us to make changes throughout the year based on their ongoing feedback and remarks. This past year we were able to overcome said obstacle and exchanged our previously cumbersome printed teachers' manuals and even bulkier media players for tablets and Bluetooth speakers. The decision to make the leap to tablets and Bluetooth speakers has allowed us to provide teachers with updated versions of our curriculum throughout the year without having to continually print physical copies. We are still in search of a reliable yet affordable tablet that can adequately withstand the elements of rural communities (more on that to come), but overall the decision to upgrade our technology has helped us both streamline and continue to innovate –a match made in heaven.

Toddlers and Teenagers: A generational approach towards creating positive change: This past year we made a concerted effort to tap into the potential of not only our students, but of our youth facilitators as well. With the help of our local partners, we've been fortunate to recruit some incredibly inspiring and dedicated youth whom despite their desire

to become leaders in their communities, had previously had their voices stifled. By becoming members of Magical Classroom and positioned as educators whose results quickly speak for themselves, these youth now find themselves positioned as engaged actors and influencers in the development of their very own communities. By adding monthly group meetings that touched on different issues pertaining to life both in and out of the classroom and additional opportunities for our strongest teachers to share their experiences, our facilitators now find themselves not only with a space to speak up, but are now more than willing to do so. Given the reserved and conservative nature of the population whom we serve, this is quite possibly the most inspiring accomplishment that our program to date. Not only are we paving the way for the future by making sure that rural children have an opportunity to be successful in their education, but we're also tapping into the potential of a generation that can start to make a difference **right. now.**



Partnering to serve

Our mission at Magical Classroom is to bring high-quality and contextualized preschool education to as many of the countless underserved rural communities throughout Guatemala as possible. We long ago realized that we can't reasonably set about this huge task on our own and have slowly but surely been able to serve more and more communities in diverse areas with the help of our amazing partners, all of whom share our vision of an educated and engaged Guatemala. We'd like to show some love for some of those partners and the regions that they help support.

While we just started officially partnering with them at the onset of this school year, working with our friends at the **Tillotson Guatemala Fund** has been like a cool breeze on a steamy Retalhuleu afternoon. I mention Retalhuleu, because thanks to the *TGF* we expanded to this coastal territory this year, training and working side-by-side with ten incredibly motivated and inspiring youth facilitators in five different communities. Prior to this expansion, we our experience had been limited to working in the cool and more culturally-reserved Western Highland region of the country and to be honest, we weren't quite sure what to expect of adding our largest facilitator group in an unfamiliar area. One year later and it's fair to say that our partnership has been nothing short of a rousing success and the 100+ children reached by our program that otherwise would not have received preschool education are a testament to our success. We are happy to once again count on the support of the *TGF* for 2017 and remain committed to continue and improve upon our work in the communities of Retalhuleu. For this year, we plan on partnering in a handful of communities more rural than some where we worked last year. Any day now we'll be confirming the newest members of our team –but the coolest part about this process? After starting from scratch a year and a half ago, we now have a wait list of communities interested in partnering with us. Now *that* is something to feel proud of.

It wouldn't be possible to talk about expansion and growth had we not found a partner willing to bet on the potential of the program back in our infancy and fund what quickly became our model facilitator group in the frigid highlands of Chiantla, Huehuetenango. Our partnership with **Miracles in Action** has been like a match made in heaven from the get-go, as we were able to piggy-back our program onto their many years of community works in Chiantla over the years and bring Magical Classroom into the area starting back in 2015. With the help of *Miracles in Action* and that inaugural group of facilitators, we were able to create and refine an educational and supervision model that works in even the most rural and harsh environments. For that alone we will forever cherish our partnership with *Miracles in Action* and the good people of Chiantla. This past year *Miracles* continued to support our work in Chiantla by helping our group of six very special young girls bring preschool education to their five different communities. We couldn't be more grateful for *MIA's* commitment to lifting up and empowering Guatemala's most needy and aspire to again collaborate once more towards imparting lasting change in the majestic *Sierra de los Cuchumatanes*. This year we plan on bringing mostly the

same group back from last year and supplementing our work with additional parent outreach workshops. We can't wait to start what is now year three for us in Chiantla!

This past year we decided to bring the program back to the beautiful shores of Lake Atitlán –once our home-base during our first year of classes. Our return to the Lake was made possible thanks entirely to a new partnership that *still* has us buzzing with excitement. Our friends over at **Starfish** are constantly exploring how to innovate their inspiring program which works to educate and empower indigenous girls throughout Sololá. Thanks to Starfish's innovative *New Horizons* program which seeks to find meaningful internships for the dynamic young women set to graduate from their mentorship program, we were able to add two dynamic and creative facilitators to our stable of teachers. Starfish graduates tend to possess a knack for leadership and an entrepreneurial spirit that lends itself perfectly for leading a Magical Classroom and the two graduates with whom we had the fortune of working with this past year were no different. Simply put: the fit between Starfish graduates and Magical Classroom could not be more ideal. As two organizations that work almost exclusively with young girls (in 2016 24 of our program-wide 26 teachers were young women), we are thrilled by the prospects of a continued partnership with Starfish for 2017 and hopefully beyond. Thank you Starfish for your support! For this year, we plan on building upon last years' experience with an extended 3-month pilot partnership of for three facilitators.

Neither Magical Classroom nor our sister program, Let's Be Ready, would be in the position to make an impact in the lives of hundreds of Guatemalan children if it weren't for the incredibly generous support of our friends and longtime partners, **Common Hope**. For several years now, Common Hope has kindly allowed us to hold training activities at different times of the year in their beautiful facilities in Antigua free of cost. The benefits of being able to use their facilities is quite honestly impossible to quantify as it provides us with the unique opportunity to have our entire staff hailing from their distant homes all housed and trained under the same roof for an entire week at a time. It also doesn't hurt that this all gets to happen in the context of the one-of-a-kind colonial backdrop of Antigua, a place which very few of our facilitators have had the privilege to visit prior. We quite simply could not be more grateful and appreciative of our relationship with Common Hope and will continue to explore new avenues for collaboration moving forward.

We are also finalizing the partnership agreement between Magical Classroom/Let's Be Ready and **The Mathile Institute** to provide both programs with a nutrition component that is high-impact not only regarding combating malnutrition, but also in strengthening our program. The current agreement is to serve the combined projected total of 600 students of LBR/MC with a free daily dosage of an extremely fortified *atol* (a cultural staple similar to porridge) that has been proven to drastically improve visible physical growth, cerebral development while also reducing proclivity of contracting different types of illnesses. Mathile is offering to sell us their specially formulated product at cost, sharing any useful materials and helping us design new and improved ones, consult and accompany us as needed throughout the year (min. once a month), lending the equipment necessary to measure the impact of this intervention, and interpreting said collected data. We should have a finalized agreement in place in

the next few days and will hopefully have the pieces in place to begin distribution in time for the start of classes in March.

With our new endeavor into nutrition, we have been trying to absorb any knowledge and best practices from different experienced health-based organizations, and the **Maya Health Alliance** is one such non-profit that has offered to support us in different invaluable ways in 2017. We plan on complementing each other's work when possible and will make sure that our field staff learns as much as possible from their experienced and collaborative staff. This organization's combination of experience, cultural sensitivity and heavy focus on research-quality evaluation and data collection couldn't be a more perfect fit for helping mold our nutrition program going forward.

2017: Projected numbers

We currently are finalizing the preparations for the upcoming school year, and while some details can change we anticipate training **24 facilitators** working out of **four departments (states)** in **15 different communities**, and preparing approximately **315 students** for success in the first grade. Those projected 315 students will not only receive classes, but will also receive a daily nutritional supplement designed to effectively combat early malnutrition thanks to our newly formed partnership with [The Mathile Institute](#). Our new nutrition program (which will be discussed in greater detail later on) will provide our enrolled students and up to **300 of their younger siblings** with greatly subsidized access to the same nutritional supplement in their homes.

Training

As previously mentioned we take great pride in being able to mold rural youth into confident and dynamic educators thanks to not only our practical and easy-to-follow curriculum, but also because of our training approach. After just one week of training and a little bit of encouragement at the beginning, our youth have proven to be able to effectively and confidently lead classes for an entire school year while feeling part of something bigger than themselves.

In the past our trainings have been week-long summer camp-style affairs where facilitators are equipped with all the knowledge, practice and friendships needed to be successful during the school year. Both newcomers and veteran facilitators are in attendance, and are brought up to speed on improvements made to the program while rehashing the basics (or learning them for the first time). This year our training will be slightly shorter, but it will feature more time dedicated for the most crucial topics. Thanks to the high amount of teachers projected to return (75%-plus!), we will be reducing the amount of time previously dedicated to going over basic classroom management techniques and traveling to a local school, and will rather pair rookie facilitators with veterans for minimum one week of live practice upon the conclusion of the training. We feel confident that this change will allow our team to spend more time on the most important topics, while also providing new teachers with more live practice than previously afforded prior to beginning their own classes.



2017: How we can be better

With the close of 2016, we've already set our sights on the tangible steps necessary for us to continue to grow and improve for 2017. Here are some of our plans so far:

New additions

If 2016 taught us anything, it was just how fragile and precarious our structure was. While we've long taken great pride in our small staff, we now recognize that we need some extra hands on deck to help us ensure that nobody falls too far behind. With that in mind, we are ecstatic to welcome our new Administrative Assistant, Sofia Garcia, to our team. With 10+ years of experience working closely in all aspects of Guatemalan non-profit management, Sofia brings a wealth of knowledge and a highly diverse skillset to our team. A jack-of-all-trades with a penchant for organization (and a love for rugged travel!), Sofia stands to help us reel in and effectively implement our team's best ideas. Her ability to both manage an office and hold court in their field with community stakeholders stands to help our team improve communication with existing partners while also exploring new prospective alliances. We could not be more excited to call Sofia a part of the Magical Classroom team moving forward.

A call to action

We are very proud of the program that we have been able to create up to this point and will continue work tirelessly this year to make improvements to our internal operations and programming as we see fit, but we undoubtedly need to do a better job of sharing our work with others and securing the funding that we need to operate today. We plan on having more time and resources dedicated to fundraising and continuing to secure grants and partnership agreements preferably on a multi-year basis. We will continue to lower our overall administration expenses and ensure that our program operates from an increasingly sustainable standpoint moving forward. With a program model that we feel more confident than ever in, we know that now is the time to get the word out to other local/international organizations and potentially interested foundations. We need partners that share and value our vision and are willing to help us increase our impact in the areas where we're already established and that can potentially facilitate our expansion into new territories. An absolute priority is to shore up our current deficit of outside funding for our current administrative expenses. Achieving that will bring us closer to our larger goal for 2017 of having our operations fully funded by the end of the year.



Eager to learn

In a similar effort of introspection and strengthening our internal structure, we are greatly excited by the prospect of working in tandem with the good people of **GoPhilanthropic**, an international non-profit incubator of sorts that has offered help coach our team and improve our organizational capacity moving forward. Our team is both young and hardworking, but a little guidance couldn't possibly hurt as we move towards a sustainable growth trajectory. We are committed to getting better from the inside out in 2017 and our collaboration with *GoPhilanthropic* could play a big role in that very pursuit.



The pursuit of a true accompaniment model

This upcoming year we finally plan to implement a long-discussed and much-needed change to our organizational model designed to help alleviate the substantial cost (in resources, time and physical exhaustion) of intensive travel from our operation headquarters to all of our partner communities throughout the year. We admittedly fell short in checking up on our facilitators in their communities during the year and were unable to implement some of the exciting ideas that our team tends to brew up in the year due to the distance between our administrative team and facilitators. With that in mind, we have decided to create a more integral facilitator accompaniment model that seeks to redistribute certain tasks and empower our strongest facilitators by elevating them to positions as Community Coordinators. Our hope is that these Community Coordinators (CC's), whom will be carefully selected by our core team based on previous teaching experience and demonstrated leadership qualities, will be able to provide on-demand support to their peers located in their respective regions throughout the year, while also taking on side-projects and student evaluation at times. This restructuring of responsibilities will allow us to reduce the importance of costly travel carried out by our core staff and newly bring back into focus the needs and experiences present in our partner communities. Facilitators will benefit from more regular visits taken place in their classrooms and will additionally take part in

monthly meetings with the rest of their peers in the area so as to encourage a stronger sense of community and self-help during the year.



Getting parents involved

As previously mentioned we also plan on investing in the continual education of our Community Coordinators and plan to entrust them at times with occasional side projects. This year we plan to roll out one such pilot program designed to promote by holding fun and dynamic workshops designed for parents so that an extension of Magical Classroom learning concepts can make the leap occurring exclusively in the classroom and into the child's home. The contributing factor behind this new program was brought on by observed dwindling attendance numbers in certain communities during the middle months of the year and after many conversations and visits in the field, our team attributed these attendance drops to mediocre parent engagement. With the vast majority of our students' parents failing to have graduated from elementary school, one could understand how placing importance on preschool education could fall low on the list of priorities. Our intended aim of this new parent engagement pilot program (soon to be renamed, don't worry!), is to make sure that preschool education and its continuance into the household begins to occupy a higher importance in the minds of our program's parents. Implementing such programs and keeping them going at regular and frequent intervals simply wouldn't be realistically possible in a world without empowered boots on the ground in the form of CC's in each region.

We have already begun to employ the CC model in one of our partner regions and have found that it has made a **huge** difference and has helped make everybody's life a little bit easier. As a program that's been more reliant on selecting and empowering good people rather than outright supervision, the integration of the Community Coordinator model to our organizational structure will only bring us that

much closer to offering a true accompaniment experience for our facilitators and community stakeholders alike.

Mind and body prepared: Tackling malnutrition from the classroom

In an effort to boost our academic program while also make a larger impact in the homes of our students and their families we have added a nutritious snack component to our daily operations. By working with The Mathile Institute and forming local mothers groups whom will be engaged throughout the year with different activities delivered by our Community Coordinators, we will provide all of our students with a serving size of *Chispuditos*, a micronutrient-infused and culturally palatable *atole* drink that has shown to significantly reduce chronic malnutrition and other chronic illnesses across children ages 0-6 years old in rural Guatemala in previous applications.



We view this nutrition program as a critical addition to our operations for a multitude of reasons:

Parent engagement: In previous years, we have learned that parent involvement and overall enthusiasm towards the program is crucial towards avoiding dips in attendance in later months of the school year, particularly when the rainy season hits. Having this atole which is to be prepared by rotating mothers throughout the year and providing them with more opportunities to be involved and offer their opinions regarding the program brings us closer to the decision makers of homes by default.

Combating and preventing malnutrition amongst future students: Additionally, we will offer *Chispuditos* (13-14 Quetzales/ \$1.60 for a month's supply, per child) to the younger siblings of our students whom stand to benefit the most from this product at a subsidized cost. While *Chispuditos* will benefit children as old as 6 years old, studies have shown that interventions within a child's first 1,000 days of life (or as close to it) are much substantially more effective in helping that child maximize their

cognitive and corporal development potential. We are banking on parents becoming convinced of the product's impact over the course of the first heavily subsidized year and anticipating that after seeing the results firsthand, that they'll be willing to pay a little bit more each following year. This measure will hopefully prevent us from creating a sense of dependency in our partner communities and lead to ur families to choosing to give their children Chispuditos on their own, rather than doing so just because we told them so or gave it away free.

A combined approach: What has both us and The Mathile Institute most excited is being able to tap into the potential of combining a proven deterrent for child malnutrition and combining it with engaging academic preparation. Per our agreement with Mathile, we are responsible for collecting before-and-after data of height, weight, and hemoglobin, all invaluable indicators, throughout the year. What has both programs excited is capturing the academic progress related to our nutrition intervention this year and seeing if any corollaries exist. Our sister program, *Let's Be Ready*, just learned that their students have gone on to have a 92% success rate in the first grade. How and will those numbers improve with the addition of Chispuditos? We're hoping that this new combined method approach will bring us greater results across all areas of our program.



Concluding remarks

Full of growth both in numbers and experiences, 2016 proved to be a year full of learning opportunities at every turn. The good thing is that we're all pretty good listeners and are eager to reshuffle the deck a bit and work towards improving all aspects of program performance in 2017. We may end up having a slightly lower number of classrooms this year, but our promise is to deliver a higher quality educational and accompaniment experience in each and every one of our communities. To all of those that have helped support us this past year: Thank you for your faith and support. Just as we have each and every year since we first began this crazy project, we promise to only improve in 2017.

Here's to the New Year!

--Michael Estill

Program Director

