



*A Catalyst for Development:  
Where Communities Take the Lead*

Growth  
Resources  
Action  
Community  
Empowerment



# GRACE Cares 2019 Annual Report



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## Letter from the Executive Director GRACE Cares 2019

*GRACE Cares's mission is to partner with local heroes and communities on small-scale community development projects that make a difference by empowering people to improve their lives. We do this with respect to local cultures and traditions. This is accomplished by helping to build healthy, educated, just, peaceful and productive communities. GRACE Cares provides expertise, funding, and support for health, education, peace and social justice, cultural preservation, and economic development projects.*

**Growth:** In 2019 we have seen all of our programs expand their vision of what they want for their communities. B4 Peace successfully helped to bring Palestinian refugee Ayman Nijim's family to the United States and also held educational events on the Palestinian Nakba and on "Forgiveness and Its Role in Peacebuilding" in Vermont. In Guatemala, Community Finance Guatemala (CFG) started the year with 14 savings groups and ended with 19, welcoming 70 new participants to the program. CFG also announced that the program is now fully under local leadership. Kali to Kali is working with their local partners in Kigali, Rwanda on the HOPE Project, which aims to improve job opportunities for community members. In 2019, the Lucknow Project supported the expansion and funding of an additional English program that routinely had classes of more than 50 students at the Mullah Jeevan School. They also organized a medical camp that served over 300 individuals. Project Hearts successfully trained nine women in their Community Health Leadership program, helped facilitate 28 filters for purifying water, 90 water tanks (tinacos) for storing water, and impacted 355 families, including 102 children. Finally, in 2019, the work on the Garsemuke Well Project was started in earnest by the Watha community of Garsemuke Village. The well will serve a population of approximately 1,117 people with 248 households in Garsemuke village.

**Resources:** These communities depend on financial support. We have been encouraging our programs to delve into their own fundraising and social media. This can be a challenge for some of our programs with limited resources. That is why we depend on our donors who continue to sustain our current programs and provide the impetus for new programs in 2020.

**Action:** This year we have become more active on social media – check out our Facebook Page! We also made a conscious effort to spread the word about our projects and our goals. In 2020, we are looking for additional board members to help provide fresh insight in this rapidly changing world. GRACE Cares has also taken on new leadership staff which will provide us more focus and expand our programs.

**Community:** Every project we collaborate with has local heroes who are passionate about strengthening their communities. These heroes work with their communities at a grassroots level to determine community priorities, ranging from providing sustainable agricultural programs and water systems to education, social services, and health care. The commitment of these heroes has illustrated what can be accomplished to make their communities a better place.

**Empowerment:** 2019 was the year the world became empowered. In the United States, where political and social change is abundant, B4 Peace has made the silent voices heard. And internationally, Project Hearts is empowering women in Baitoa, which is a male dominant society. All of our programs were inspired from these global changes and it is easily reflected in the growth of all of our projects.

With gratitude,

Lamia Lahrech, PhD



# B4 Peace

**Background:** GRACE Cares believes it is important to promote the arts and education projects that develop individual and community awareness on the importance of peacebuilding. By doing so, they join citizens across the globe to reflect on decisions that impact the lives of vulnerable people. We promote an agenda that respects the rights and responsibilities of humans: the right to be free and to live peacefully and to learn how to build peace within individuals, families, and communities.

**Activities:** B4 Peace successfully helped to bring Palestinian refugee Ayman Nijim's family to the United States. Thanks to generous donations and six years of hard work on Ayman Nijim's part, Ayman was reunited with his wife Samah and their children Malik and Kareem on March 7, 2019. Ayman is from Gaza and sought and won asylum status in the US. He successfully gained legal entry into the US for his family after completing bureaucratic processes in 3 languages.



Ayman was a local peace hero in Gaza, where he had worked for various international organizations, including Save the Children, to help children and families cope with the trauma of war. In the US he had positions of increasing responsibility helping US citizens and immigrants find jobs. Now Ayman, with the support of his family by his side, is serving as Program Officer for the Middle East at Grassroots International and is helping thousands of people in this conflict-filled region.

B4 Peace also held educational events on the Palestinian Nakba and on “Forgiveness and Its Role in Peacebuilding” in Vermont. Namaya and Zoe Kopp, co-founders of B4 Peace, held a Nakba Memorial Educational presentation followed by a Middle-Eastern feast in Brattleboro, Vermont. The Nakba occurred when more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs, approximately half of the prewar Palestine's Arab population, fled or were expelled from their homes during the 1948 Israel war against the local population. Attendees from all over New England learned about the Nakba from Faisal Salah, Founder of the Palestinian Museum in Connecticut. Mr. Salah and many other Palestinians still carry the key of homes they were forced from during the formation of the state of Israel. B4 Peace’s goal is to educate the public about the complicated Middle-East situation and promote understanding.

Namaya was invited to present on “Forgiveness and its Role in Peacebuilding” at the Centre Congregational Church in Brattleboro, Vermont. People of many different faiths gathered to consider and discuss the important role that forgiveness on a personal and national level plays in peacebuilding. There are many examples of forgiveness from the Amish families in the US who visited the families of the murderers of their children to personally offer forgiveness.



The B4 Peace team, including Dean Gallea, Zoe Kopp, Kasey Ochiltree, and Namaya began preparations for a multi-year project “Journey to Forgiveness: Vietnam.” The objective of the project is to educate the public about the on-going impact of this war which ended in 1975, yet continues to harm and kill in the US and in SE Asia. Trauma from the war plagues a generation of US soldiers and others who were affected by Agent Orange. In Vietnam and neighboring Laos and Cambodia unexploded bombs and Agent Orange continue to cause harm. We as a nation are still paying the debt incurred by that war.





# Community Finance Guatemala

**Background:** Thousands of indigenous Kakchiquel Maya households throughout the Chimaltenango department (~counties) of Guatemala live with constant financial uncertainty and instability, which greatly diminishes their overall quality of life. Community Finance Guatemala (CFG) is dedicated to reversing this situation by supporting indigenous Guatemalan women with the necessary knowledge and tools to empower themselves to organize their own financial systems. Project founder and director Andrew Becker arrived in Guatemala in 2013 to consult for a local social business, Soluciones Comunitarias, which is dedicated to offering innovative services to alleviate many of the challenges faced by the indigenous populations throughout the country. By working directly with their local team and having countless individual and group discussions with constituents, Andrew designed what is now the CFG project. While Andrew was able to support and train a few savings groups on his own, CFG really didn't take off until in 2016 when he found two incredible local heroes of Comalapa, Doña Maria Sotz and Wilfred Son, to take over the training of the groups themselves. This dynamic duo has since taken over management of the project locally and has grown it to become more successful than Andrew could have ever imagined.



**Activities:** We started the year with 14 savings groups and ended with 19, welcoming 70 new participants to the program. Among the 5 new groups this year was our first-ever all men's group, formed by husbands and brothers of the women of our longest-standing group, which is now four years old.



Along with this new mens group, many of the women's groups shared how this program has continued to support them. They have been empowering themselves by confronting limiting stories like, "I could never save," which have kept them from pursuing goals to improve their families' welfare. Many participants told us how, as women, they rarely leave their homes or have time to socialize with other women. The time together creates spaces where they can support one another and laugh together, lightening their burdens.

Our team members further enriched these spaces with talks around themes relevant to their lives—from family planning, nutrition, women's empowerment and self-confidence, to caring for the environment and reducing plastic use. We continuously explore how to skillfully bring greater depth into the program.

One of our proudest achievements this year is that the program is now fully under local leadership. In September 2019, founder Andrew Becker stepped back into an advisory position, and Wilfred Son stepped into the position of Community Finance (CF) Director. This left a CF Advisor position to be filled by Adelina Tubac, who had been a CF Promotor. The team then selected an active and bright young woman from among our groups, Lilia Icu, to be a new CF Promotor. Community leader María Sotz continues to serve as a CF Advisor, and as a trusted teacher, counselor, and motivator for all group members.

Another question we ask is: how can we work towards greater financial sustainability? Here are two ideas we that we launched as a pilot:

#### (1) Becoming an Investor in our Groups:

To maximize the impact of your donations, we invested funds directly in the groups where they can earn an interest. Here's how it works: Some groups give so many loans to their members that their cash box is virtually always empty. Due to the high demand for loans, these groups sometimes need access to more cash. So, CFG becomes a member of an existing savings group and deposits Q1000 (approx. \$125) to be used as seed money for loans within the group. At the end of the 1-year cycle, the group members receive their savings plus the interest earned throughout the year. As a member, CFG gets its Q1000 back with the interest earned, which can help cover program costs.

This option can benefit the savings group members and extend the impact of donations. We started piloting this idea with a few of our longest-standing groups who are enthusiastic about participating, and will be providing the option to more groups in the future.

(2) Artisan Women's Enterprise:



One group sought our help to find new income-generating opportunities using their skills as weavers. We made contact with Texas-based online retailer Sunshine Tienda, who loved the idea of selling a hat with a colorful handwoven band. Several weeks and a few hiccups later, we had found a hat-maker in Guatemala and successfully delivered samples. We were so thrilled when Sunshine Tienda placed their first order for more than 100 hats! A portion of the sales of the hats will go towards program costs.



Building an artisan component can provide income-generating opportunities for our women *and* an additional funding source for the program. As many of our groups are full of talented weavers, we see tremendous opportunities to grow this artisan venture in the future. Be on the lookout for Sunshine Tienda hats!

**Future:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we have had to radically change the way we are supporting the communities we work in. During this time, we are focusing on providing critical health education and start-up home garden kits. Now more than ever we need to help protect the most vulnerable across the globe.

We are leveraging our network of 19 savings groups comprised of more than 250 families to share critical health information with the 15 communities they form a part of. We are sharing simple how-to videos to teach families to build at home hand washing systems and to start and manage their own home gardens. We also provide the seed packets to help them get started. Lastly, we are facilitating a WhatsApp group for all the members to stay connected, share success stories, and support each other.

We still do not know how long Guatemala, and the rest of the world, will be at risk and so we will continue to support our communities from a safe distance, staying open to new and innovative ideas to help us all get through this as safe as possible.



# Kali to Kali

**Background:** Kali to Kali operates in Rwanda and aims to provide sustained education and wellness efforts in areas of need. These efforts are done by supporting local education systems and schools, providing access to clean water, addressing hygiene issues, and providing access to proper nutrition. Over the years, Kali to Kali has established long-term relationships with organizations overseas to ensure that sustainability can be continued. In addition, local workers are used to support and stimulate local economies.



**Activities:** We are currently working with our local partner ANA Rwanda and SUBIRUSEKE (a non-profit organization aiming to support communities in need in Kigali, Rwanda) in Kigali, Rwanda on the HOPE Project, which aims to improve job opportunities for community members living in the Rutonde Village in Kigabiro Sector, Bwiza Cell, Rwamagana District. The HOPE project is creating and assembling workshops for a year to help train teens and young adults to master new skills in sewing, tailoring, and cooking to enhance the community members job opportunities. The project is also organizing meetings to discuss and show the community hygiene and sanitation approaches in hopes to increase awareness of proper hygiene and sanitation techniques. We are also constructing a filtered water well and 30-40 fruit/vegetable gardens to provide the community with local and filtered clean water as well as local free food supplies for families to combat malnutrition.



Projected Outcomes:

- Over 500 youth and young adults will have access to training through the workshops for greater job opportunities.
- Reduction of diseases and illnesses in local communities.
- Access to local clean water and food supplies.



We are also working with another of our local non-profit organization partners in Kigali, Rwanda, called SEDI Rwanda, which aims to improve education and development in

impoverished communities in Kigali, Rwanda. In January 2019, we collaborated on the Nursery School Project, which paid for 50 students school fees at the Irerero Nursery School, brought new school uniforms, and established a continuous feeding program in order to increase student enrollment and decrease student dropout rates.



**Future:** Along with SEDI Rwanda We are hoping to collaborate soon (barring COVID) with SEDI Rwanda to create a Capacity Building (Pilot) Project. This project will train roughly 10-20 community members in the Irerero Nursery School on acquiring new skills, such as sewing, tailoring, and crafting leather goods (shoes, belts, and bags) for better job opportunities beyond the widely common job of pot making in the community. The funding will go to paying for the proper equipment, running electricity, and hiring the proper instructors to run the workshops. This project will last roughly 3 to 6 months once it is funded. In order to achieve this goal, the project will require \$4,100 USD.



# Lucknow

**Background:** In 2008, Nazeela Nasseri, a U.S citizen of Indian descent decided to take action after recognizing the need for basic education and healthcare through a visit with her maternal grandfather to the Amethi region. Soon after, she began travelling to India during the summer to teach English in the school for girls in Amethi. The Lucknow project was eventually established to introduce an Intensive English Program in the region’s schools. Nazeela’s sister, Afshan Nasseri, is now the director of the Lucknow Project.



**Activities:** In 2019, the Lucknow Project supported the expansion and funding of an additional English program that routinely had classes of 50-plus students at the Mullah Jeevan School. These English classes attract many students who are non-religious and do not

attend the school, so the program has given opportunities to children of all backgrounds. We also organized a medical camp that served over 300 individuals. Finally, the Lucknow Project typically donates funds for new outfits for the students at our three schools during the Eid holidays. The donation of new garments is important for honoring the tradition of wearing new clothes for the holidays of Eid.



**Future:** In the future, the Lucknow Project is going to focus most importantly on addressing the impact that COVID-19 has had on our communities and serving people in the ways that they have been affected, particularly in regard to healthcare and education. Beyond the focus on COVID-19, we would like to construct a community garden in the near future.



# Project Hearts

**Background:** Baitoa is a rural municipality located in the north of the Dominican Republic with a population of approximately 15,000 people. Due to its lack of infrastructure and social services, Baitoa suffers from problems like access to quality education and health care, sanitary forms of waste disposal, clean water supply, and employment opportunities.

Prior to being officially recognized as a Dominican NGO in 2011, Project Hearts existed informally in the personal service of founder Rubén Ottenwalder. Since 2011, Project Hearts has been refining its mission to ensure we are working in such a way as to truly empower our communities. For this reason, we are focused on addressing critical needs that fall into three primary categories: health, economic development, and education.



**Activities:** We were able to accomplish the following in 2019:

- W.A.S.H. (Water Access, Sanitation & Hygiene):
  - Helped facilitate 28 filters for purifying water, saving beneficiaries over \$3,400 that they otherwise would have spent purchasing 5-gallon jugs of potable water.

- Facilitated 90 water tanks (tinacos) for storing water.
- Impacted 355 families, including 102 children.
- Saved families more than \$12,500 just by providing financial assistance.
- SurFuturo recognized our dedication to helping people & awarded us the grand prize in their “Sowing Water” awards ceremony.



- Community Health Leadership:
  - 9 women graduated from our CHL course.
  - Approximately 80 homes were visited by these women and the 320 members of these homes learned basic preventative health care.



- Community Outreach:
  - Distributed donations of clothes, toys, and diapers.
  - Partnered with a local politician to construct a new house for a single mom and her five children.
  - Provided financial aid to cover the costs of a medical student.
  - Donated a walker to an elder.

- 52 educational presentations in schools, covering sex ed., dental hygiene, and general values.
- Visited 32 sick people.
- 20 couples received counseling
- Encouraged 18 youth struggling with depression.
- Comforted more than 25 families mourning loved ones.

**Future:** In addition to continuing our current work, we would also like to expand what we're doing in order to address areas of interest expressed by community members themselves. Some of what we're hoping to develop and implement in 2020 are:

- Offer professional counseling to individuals & couples who may otherwise not have access to such services.
- Graduate our first cohort of Haitian Community Health Leaders.
- Work more intentionally with men and youth to ensure holistic empowerment of Baitoa's residents.





# Watha

**Background:** The Uzima Community Development Project supports the well-being and development of the Watha people in the Galana region of Kenya through development programs in education, health care, water access, and human rights training. The Wathas primarily inhabit four villages within the Kisiki sub-region with a majority living in Garisemuke Village in the Galana area. Most Wathas earn a living through farming, hunting, or charcoal burning. In addition to natural disasters and cyclical climate events like droughts, the Wathas have encountered the following developmental problems that have had adverse effects on their daily lives:

- Access to clean water: As a marginalized community, the Watha have historically confronted difficulties in securing access to their own clean water supply. In addition to the history of discrimination, the Watha have had to deal with frequent crocodile attacks which have made the acquisition of water even more difficult.
- Poor infrastructure: The Galana region is considered an undeveloped area with poor or under-paved roads that become impassable during the rainy season. Many residents live in simple huts with thatched roofs and mud floors and walls. As with the differential access to water, the lack of infrastructure in the Watha community seems to be an endemic problem.
- Health care: The nearest dispensary is located in the town of Bombi, a 4-5 km walk for many residents. Beyond the distance, the dispensary lacks adequate health facilities, equipment, and medications with only one on-call nurse. Mobile health services run by the county government of Kilifi have only been available on a sporadic basis, and the majority of people have had to rely on traditional herbal medications without proper access to medical care.
- Food security: The Galana community depends heavily on subsistence farming and charcoal burning with very little opportunity for livestock husbandry. However, since the region tends to be very arid and susceptible to floodwaters, it is very difficult to raise crops consistently. The problems are exacerbated by the rate of deforestation to produce charcoal.
- Education: The level of illiteracy is much higher within the Watha community compared to other neighboring communities. The residents not only suffer from a lack of resources (e.g., schools, teachers) but also face economic pressures that compel families to keep children at home.



**Activities:** In 2019, the work on the Garsemuke Borehole Project was started in earnest by the Watha community of Garsemuke Village. There was full community participation from the beginning until the end of the project. The Watha community of Garsemuke village can now access safe drinking water and enjoy better hygiene, avoiding the dangers of crocodiles as well as the diseases in the river. The borehole will serve a population of approximately 1,117 people with 248 households in Garsemuke village. The overall project goal is to improve health and sanitation and mitigate the fate of crocodile attacks for the Watha community in five villages. We are looking forward to start the second borehole at Bombi Village as soon as the funds are available.



**Future:** In addition to building the well, a committee was formed to oversee the project. The committee is represented by both men and women from the village. The committee will be tasked to manage and educate the villagers to prevent improper usage of the water by overseeing day-to-day operation and setting policies to ensure all members participate in membership contribution through their group in order to cover future maintenance costs.

The community in the village is also planning to register their own self-help group through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development in order to articulate other development activities, maintaining their resources and the water project being the heart of the main activity. The committee will be reporting to the villagers during the meetings on the progress of the borehole, making decisions about appropriate duties of the community water committee, and continuing to educate the community in the maintenance and benefit of the water system.



# Financial Statement

In 2019, GRACE Cares had a total operating budget of \$92,336.72 received from donations. We gratefully received \$54,153.59 in individual donations, \$1,120.00 in corporate donations, and fundraising and major donations received equaling \$37,063.13. Our total expenditures in 2019 were \$99,746.10.

We are proud to say that \$86,352.68 of our income went to programs. That is, 86.5% of expenditures went directly into our programs. Of the remaining expenditures \$13,393.42 went to fundraising, administrative, management, and contract costs.

Our detailed financial review is available upon request at [info@gracecares.org](mailto:info@gracecares.org).



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## **Board of Directors**

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Dean Gallea, BS, Vice President  
Kasey Ochiltree, MS, General Secretary  
Sergio Garcia, CPA, Treasurer  
Daryl Caggiano, BA  
Philippe Elghouayel, PhD  
Danielle Huffaker, BA  
Zoe Kopp, PhD

## **Staff**

Lamia Lahrech, PhD, Executive Director  
Cindy Levine, Financial Director

## **Interns and Volunteers**

Rita Bacho, Planning and Evaluation Assistant Intern  
Daryl Caggiano, Fundraising Volunteer  
Mina Douba, Social Media Intern  
Katherine Treat, Grant Writing Intern

# Donors

**We are grateful for the generosity of our 2019 donors and volunteers as well as our *Corporate, Organization, Foundation and Matching Donors***

Abdulazeem Ismail	Jill Perlstein
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