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A Brief History of Rotary/ABPD/Village Partnerships

Deb Walters, ALDEA Rotary Committee Chair, April 2021

Over the years many different groups of Rotarians have partnered with ABPD and Kaqchikel villages in the highlands of Guatemala on projects to reduce chronic childhood malnutrition. There have been four main Rotarians from the US who have coordinated these efforts, and each “discovered” ABPD in a different way. While the major fundraising for these projects is done by the US Rotarians, the most essential Rotarians are from three Rotary Clubs in Guatemala, as they work closely with ABPD and frequently visit the villages. Finally, the most important members of these partnerships are the more than 65 villages involved.

ALDEA (the US based sister organization of ABPD) asked Deb Walters to collect information about the Rotary connections and to help direct interested Rotarians to existing collaborations. The research revealed that Rotarians have brought in over \$2,000,000 for the projects through cash and Rotary Foundation grants. This result surprised just about everyone, including the Rotarians, as most people had only seen the partnerships they were involved in, and not the overall picture.

The first US Rotarian to get involved with ABPD was Dan Strobell from Utah. At some time in the distant past (in other words we don't know quite when), Dan saw a short TV report on poverty in Guatemala. He and his sons gathered up supplies and went to help. In Guatemala he met Sue Patterson, who lives in Antigua and has connections with many NGO's. Sue put Dan in touch with ABPD, and Dan began recruiting other Rotarians to donate cash for projects with ABPD, including smoke-free stoves, which are one of the necessary components of an integrative plan to reduce chronic childhood malnutrition.

In 2004 Bruce Powell, also from Utah, visited Guatemala. He explored over a dozen NGO's looking for a good partner for a Rotary grant. Fortunately, he also met Sue Patterson and she introduced him to ABPD, which immediately rose to the top of his list. For his first partnership with ABPD, Bruce worked his Rotary connections to find a Rotary Club in Guatemala willing to join as the Host Club. He had to go all the way to Puerto Barrios, over eight hours from the project location, to find a willing club. For his subsequent grants Bruce made connections with the Guatemala del Este Club in Guatemala City, and the La Antigua Club, and they served as Host Clubs on his other grants. His first Rotary Matching Grant for ABPD was funded in 2006, and centered on clean water and sanitation, another of the necessary components of reducing chronic childhood malnutrition.

In 2006 Rick Lawrence, from the Connecticut and Massachusetts Rotary district, visited Guatemala. Rick attended the meeting of the Antigua Rotary Club, and learned about the great work of ABPD. Since the Antigua Club couldn't at the time be the host club on a Rotary grant with Rick, he went the cash route and began recruiting other Rotarians to donate for projects with ABPD on water and sanitation. The first of his yearly projects began in 2007. Rick would bring groups of Rotarians to visit Guatemala, and Sue Paterson would host them at her home, and enlighten them about the actual conditions in Guatemala.

In 2007, Dan Strobell met Bruce Powell. Dan was seeking help in writing a Rotary Matching Grant and called the Grants Chair of his district, who just happened to be Bruce Powell. Bruce introduced Dan to the Guatemala del Este Rotary Club who agreed to be the Host Club. In 2008 Dan's first grant for stoves was funded. Dan has continued to fund stoves over the years, making a huge difference in the lives of thousands of families.



Women of Chipastor

In 2010, Deb Walters from the Maine and Quebec Rotary district, joined Sue Patterson to visit the village of Chipastor, where ABPD had been unable to find a Rotary partner because the project was so large and expensive. Sue also introduced Deb to Bruce Powell, and the two teamed up to create the first Rotary Global Grant project with ABPD. The La Antigua Rotary Club joined the partnership as the host club, and the grant was funded in 2011 to work with the village of Chipastor to partner with the community to develop clean water and sanitation. Deb

went on to fund additional Global Grant projects with ABPD, partnering with Bruce and with other Rotarians she recruited.

The Rotary Foundation was so impressed by the Chipastor project that they selected it as a best practice and sent a team of photographers, writers and videographers to capture the success of the project. They installed life-size photos from Chipastor in their international headquarters to illustrate the success of Rotary's projects in water and sanitation. When Bruce Powell went to his next training session with the Rotary Foundation to learn how to improve his Rotary projects, he was surprised at how little he learned. The project being described was their Chipastor project.

In 2014, Rick Lawrence moved from his seven years of cash funding and created his first Rotary Global Grant project with ABPD, again for water and sanitation. The host club was La Antigua, and they have continued to partner with him on all of his additional ABPD grants.

In 2015, ABPD received further recognition from The Rotary Foundation, when they honored Deb Walters at the United Nations as a Rotary Woman of Action based on her years of Rotary work in Guatemala in with ABPD and other NGOs.

In 2019 Deb Walters put together the first Rotary Global Grant project to fund all of the non water and sanitation components of the ABPD integrated plan to reduce chronic childhood malnutrition. This was exciting as it meant that Rotary could now partner with ABPD and villages on the entire integrated plan. Deb has been partnering with the La Antigua Rotary Club on these grants. Deb has involved over 55 Rotary Clubs from 9 Rotary Districts in Rotary grants with ABPD.

Rick Lawrence is the star US Rotarian partnering with ABPD as he has generated over half of the total Rotary funding for ABPD. Rick has involved over 60 Rotary clubs from 11 districts in his projects.

The star Rotary Club in Guatemala is the La Antigua Club, as they have served as host club for the vast majority of the Rotary partnerships with ABPD. It is because of the meticulous record keeping for these projects by Alma Olsen, and the enthusiastic promotion by Oscar Torres that their club keeps Chipastor women explaining their water problem managing to find Rotarians to join in these partnerships. They frequently visit the villages, manage the money, and oversee all aspects of the projects. Rotary projects only succeed when there are such devoted Rotarians from the Host Club involved.

It's natural that when Rotarians hear about the work of ABPD, especially those that have been familiar with lots of different NGO's around the world, they get excited. ABPD works with

each community using an empowerment methodology, that fits so well with Doc's ideas about how to serve. ABPD uses a “train the trainer” model and empowers local women to lead the efforts in reducing chronic childhood malnutrition. ABPD get results that are significantly better than other programs. ABPD is constantly evaluating the effectiveness of their model, and using the results to make it better. ABPD involves the entire community in the empowerment process. ABPD only works in each community for 2 or 3 years, and communities can sustain the work thereafter. The Rotary Foundation is correct, ABPD truly is a best practice.

In the future, more US Rotarians will find their way to ABPD, and we shouldn't be surprised if some of those connections come through Sue Patterson. These new Rotarians will hopefully experience the joys of partnering with the La Antigua Rotary Club, ABPD and Kaqchikel villages.