



International Literacy Project

Santa Avelina, Guatemala



Guatemala is a small, Central American country located just south of Mexico. It is endowed with incredible natural beauty and a vibrant pre-Columbian culture still present in the Mayan communities of its rural highlands. This culture is manifested in the indigenous languages spoken by the inhabitants of these mountainous regions.

Before the 1996 Peace Accords, which brought an end to long years of civil war in Guatemala, students who attended school in these villages were immersed in Spanish from the minute they entered the building. There was no instruction in the home language. Few learned to read. What meager educational opportunity existed previously was further diminished by years of civil war.

Life in these villages today is based on subsistence agriculture. Families earn a little cash by pooling together what little coffee they grow and selling it through a cooperative. The introduction of improved highway access, dam construction, radio, cell phones, and the Internet are beginning to link this region with the outside world. Literacy is essential to the survival and well being of these communities. Literacy is best introduced in the language of the home.

The *Centro Educativo Privado Experimental William C. Botnan* is a Kindergarten – sixth grade school located in the village of *Santa Avelina*, municipality of *San Juan Cotzal*, department of *Quiché*, Guatemala. The language is *Ixil*, one of the 23 Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala. The school was built and teacher salaries are funded by the non-governmental organization HELPS International.

www.helpsintl.org



HELPS envisions "Hub" schools that successfully implement a well-designed learning program to serve as teacher learning centers and technology resource centers for surrounding schools. The school in *Santa Avelina* serves as an educational headquarters for the *Ixil* triangle and as a model for expansion of educational initiatives throughout Guatemala.



The **Greater Washington Reading Council (GWRC)** co-sponsors this literacy project in the rural highlands of **Guatemala**. Each year, **GWRC** provides partial funding for the purchase of materials for guided reading instruction at the school, which serves as a training site for local teachers.

The teachers at the school in *Santa Avelina* have worked with a team of multi-national educators to establish a program of bilingual literacy. The goal is to introduce literacy in the home language, *Ixil*, and transition to literacy in Spanish by the end of sixth grade using a 90/10 model

(90% home language instruction/10% Spanish instruction in *Pre-Primaria*, or kindergarten, transitioning to the reverse by grade six).

GWRC members, and other interested educators from Northern Virginia, are encouraged to participate in other ways, including joining a group of educator volunteers in July for a week of on-site teacher training in best practices for literacy instruction. The focus is on first language literacy and vocabulary development in the second language, which is Spanish. The US teachers spend the mornings observing and coaching in the classrooms and the afternoons conducting workshops and helping local teachers plan instruction. Fluency in Spanish is desirable but not required. The coordinator of the project is Kathy Davin, who can be contacted at: kdavin@earthlink.net for further information about the project.

