

Guatemala – Real life story

The Scholarship, an incentive against school dropout

Damaris Amanda Car Larios is 10 years old. She attends third grade in Escuela Oficial Rural Mixta in Santa Isabel, Chimaltenango, and is one in fifteen pupils benefiting this year from the Rural Girl Scholarship, a programme created by the Ministry of Education in 2004.

Damaris fully responds to the profile designed for this purpose. She comes from a large family of thirteen siblings, a weak household economy, their parents are illiterate and, what is most important, she has a great desire to learn and keep on studying. For the foregoing reasons, her school Board chose her as one of the girls eligible for receiving an annual grant of 300 quetzals.

Consuelo Larios, Damaris's mother, says the scholarship has been of great help to her daughter: "My husband is a farmer. Right now he is working in staple and maize crops. But we live mostly off our suckling pigs, which we sell when they are fatter. But we lack a fixed income. Let's say... we don't expect to receive any money every fifteen days". And then she adds, "between you and I, when the scholarship arrived, it really helped me because I was going through a bad moment and we had no money at all."

Damaris's teacher is full of praise for her pupil: "She likes to study. She is very intelligent, very attentive; she always makes herself available when you need something. It is obvious that she likes school." And this is true because, despite her terrible shyness, reflected in the almost inaudible tone of her voice, she does not hesitate to declare: "I like school very much. I learn a lot here and want to keep on studying."



Damaris is among the most outstanding pupils in her class.

The importance of family support

Three of her siblings come to school with her every day and encourage her at home to keep on studying. Damaris explains, "My father advises me to keep going to school and not miss a day.



She reiterates her wish to finish primary school in order to have a better future.

My mother tells me to pay attention to the teacher", and she adds "my parents are happier since I got the scholarship."

And Consuelo reiterates her interest in having her children go to school: "Yes, I want my children to go to school, even if they only learn to read. They can study all they like. For instance, after the little boy finished sixth grade, he decided that he did not want to continue." Damaris's older brother was not so lucky. Those were the worst times for their parents and they could not afford the luxury of sending their boy to school. "He wanted to go to school but we could not afford it then. He has been working with my husband since he was 10 or 12 years old."

rest of the family. She is more responsible. I tell her to study all she wants and for as long as we can afford it."

Consuelo is aware that Damaris is a good student. "She really likes to go to school. She has better grades than the

"The scholarship is an incentive to the families and the girls. Being able to have this financial support that they so need facilitates their continuous school attendance", explains Irma Socop, the Community Service Coordinator from the Departmental Education Directorate of Chimaltenango.

The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, has launched the BECATÓN, an appeal to the solidarity of all Guatemalans oriented to raise funds to finance scholarships for boys and girls living in extreme poverty and still excluded from the education system. The initial goal consists in raising ten million quetzals to fund 25,000 scholarships - 400.00 quetzals each - therefore increasing the number of primary school students who, just as Damaris, will receive this incentive, which will allow them to finish primary school.

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