



Healthy Start

April 2021



What is Healthy Start?

It takes seven hours to reach the Ixil region of Guatemala, though it's only 150 miles from Guatemala City. The road is twisty, windy, and bumpy but also full of spectacular mountainous scenery. Ixils are proud Mayan descendants who experienced the worst of Guatemala's civil war in the 1980s. The repercussions of that violent time are still felt today. Despite decades of international cooperation and aid, 82% of Ixils still live in extreme poverty and 75% of the children are chronically malnourished.

Why is it so hard to overcome these tragic conditions? There are myriad reasons and many of them are systemic. For example, the region lacks access to markets, education, government services, health care, jobs, and the implementation of responses that focus on the effects rather than the causes of the problem.



Healthy Start participants receive lifegiving health services.

Unlike other aid programs, Healthy Start tackles hunger and extreme poverty at its roots. We don't take shortcuts. Our solution follows a three-step, four-year proven effective program that focuses on:

- 1. Addressing** hunger and child malnutrition. When families are hungry the children suffer the most. Healthy Start gives families the immediate food support they desperately need and helps them develop capacities to produce their own food.
- 2. Preventing** child malnutrition. It all starts in pregnancy. Healthy Start creates networks of community health workers (brigadistas) who provide health care and health education to babies and pregnant women in villages with few or no services. Our goal is to have zero cases of low weight children at birth. Once the baby is born, each mother and child are part of an educational and monitoring program that covers the first 1,000 days of a baby's life, a critical developmental period where 80% of the brain is developing, including fine and gross motor skills!
- 3. Overcoming** malnutrition. This is what makes Healthy Start a long-lasting solution. Overcoming malnutrition means:
 - *Stopping the sources of illness and infection:* No child can grow healthy if their house lacks basic services. We provide a three-year progressive housing improvement program that allows families to lay cement floors, stop roof leaks, receive filters for clean and safe water, improve latrines, and build stoves to reduce wood consumption and avoid smoke buildup inside the house. By doing this, we avoid families being exposed to parasites, bacteria, and respiratory and gastrointestinal infections.
 - *Improving agricultural skills to produce nutritional food and make a profit:* Healthy Start families received agronomist help so they could adopt agricultural best practices to improve their yields, move from one to three harvests per year, and achieve food security. The adoption of best agricultural practices and simple but effective technologies is a game changer for families.
 - *Invest in women entrepreneurship activities to diversify the household income:* Ixil woman are smart and hard-working, through rural community banks women start saving, learn how to manage credits, and start market oriented production initiatives. Women-lead business are very successful and ensure that their profits are reinvested in improving the family wellbeing.



Families gather at a backyard garden training where they learn to grow their own healthy foods!

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Rotary Webinar

[May 18, 2021](#)

Join Agros and learn how your club can partner in scaling this program.

The Latest Update

Healthy Start launched in October of 2020 in four villages. Despite a late start due to the added challenges of COVID-19 and two major hurricanes, we were able to meet our goal to reach 150 families and more than 200 children currently being served.

However, the situation in the communities is daring, as 98% of the families lost their year end harvest due to the hurricanes. At the moment we are currently in the middle of the dry season and new plantings are postponed until May.

With limited or no food reserves, we discovered families eating corn with mold which represent a serious risk due to potent toxins that might be present and could be carcinogenic. Agros is conducting lab tests to make sure such toxins are not present as infected grain is not suitable even for animal consumption.



At the moment the majority of families depend on the food packages and supplements provided by the Program and all children continue to receive fresh goat milk every week. Healthy Start is providing prenatal care and child health monitoring services. They also have started backyard garden production to improve their nutritional intake.

Without Healthy Start, these families would not be able to envision a safe and healthy future for them and their children. This program, thanks to your generous support, builds sustainable services in communities that otherwise would be unable to maintain healthy standards of living.



Previously malnourished kids are now receiving weekly rations of milk!

Great News!

In the Village of Asich the **'Overcoming'** stage of the program has begun. Thanks to donor support, Agros is about to start the construction of a clinic and an early childhood stimulation center, **ensuring permanent government presence in this village and benefiting many nearby communities.**

We will keep you posted as advances in the construction occur.

The families are grateful for your generous and caring support. They are enduring, despite the crisis, and your continuous engagement and support is more important than ever.

We are so encouraged by the support and community found in our Rotary club partnerships, and look forward to what our continued work together will produce in these communities.



What is Healthy Start?

Healthy Start is a multi-year Program focused on overcoming child malnutrition in the Ixil Region of Guatemala. It started in October 2020 with the collaboration of eight founding Rotary Clubs in three continents and has received a Global Grant.

Key Stats

- 82% of Ixils live in extreme poverty.
- 75% of children in the region are chronically malnourished.
- The villages Agros serves, working individuals currently have an income of less than 55 cents/day.
- Families survive on just one harvest of basic grains per year.
- In 2020, Healthy Start reached 150 families and more than 200 children.

How to Help

- Spread the word! Share this bulletin with friends, family, and other Rotarians.
- Invite us to speak at your next Rotary meeting! Contact Heather Ringoen at heatherr@agros.org.
- Join us for the May 18 Webinar. Visit [this link](#) for more information.