

By: Melisa Jaenisch

In December 2023, Claudia Rivera, the Guatemalan program manager for Growing up Healthy (Creciendo Sanos) program, was excited to visit with a group of knitters from Knitting for Peace. For several years, Knitting for Peace has donated knitted baby articles for the Growing Up Healthy program in Guatemala. After so many years, Claudia was able to thank them in person for their generosity and explain how meaningful the knitted articles were for new mothers in the program. The program is located in a rural area of SW Guatemala (coastal lowlands). The majority (69%) of the mothers enrolled in the program have some primary (1-6 grade) education and another 10% do not have any formal education.

The Growing up Health program is a maternal child health nurse home visiting program that provides health screenings, education, and basic medications to pregnant women and new mothers in the 12 surrounding communities. A team of 8 local Guatemalan nurses staff the program. They can be seen on most weekdays driving Tuktuks to visit women in the communities. The nurses carry a backpack with needed supplies (hanging scales, tape measures, Hemocues to measure anemia, deworming medication, iPad with electronic educational materials, etc.) for the home visits. If needed, the nurses provide referrals to the program clinic which is staffed with a family medicine doctor and pediatrician, which is a rarity for such a rural area.

Two years ago, an adolescent mother (≤ 18 years old at child's birth) component was added which provides weekly visits for 6 months to all adolescent mothers upon birth of their baby. The frequent visits enable nurses to guide and support the adolescent mother in caring for their newborns. As needed the nurse will topics of healthy relationships, self-esteem, and goal setting with the young new mother. Over 50 adolescent mothers have been through the program.

Just over 3 years ago ALMA, a maternal mental health support program was integrated into the program. The program screens program participants during and after pregnancy for symptoms of depression. If detected, the woman is offered 6-8 individual sessions where the nurses provide peer support using behavioral activation. All the women who have participated in this program have reported improvement (minimal depressive symptoms) by the end. Empathy, someone to listen and help them identify ways they can reorganize their routines to include activities that bring them more joy.

This past year, a pilot family planning program was conducted. It provided counseling and limited methods to women during their homes during the well child visits. Women were appreciative of the education and the convenience of having methods available during the visits. Women can face many barriers and stigma when accessing family planning outside their homes. Transportation, caring for children, and cost are major barriers. ___ women participated in the pilot and ___ received a FP method. We are hoping that financial support can be identified to continue the program in the future. Last week, the nurses visited a mother who had given birth 2 weeks prior. Upon examining the newborn, they identified the baby was preterm (~30 weeks), extremely small (~3.5lbs), jaundiced, and the mother was unsure how to take care of the baby.

They immediately took mother and baby to the clinic to see the pediatrician. The

pediatrician ran several tests, counseled the mother on her child's health status, and urgently referred her on to the hospital, an hour away.

The base Growing up Healthy program is financed by AgroAmerica. Technical support is provided by CU Anschutz faculty. Add on program components such as adolescent mother frequent visits, family planning education and methods, maternal mental health and malnutrition program all depend on donor funds.

If you would like to donate to the program you can do so using this direct link:

<https://giving.cu.edu/fund/creciendo-sanos-community-program-support-fund>