Our Commitment to Local Communities

Global Leadership Adventures crafts life-changing Service Learning Adventures™. Each adventure is unique and purposeful, preparing students from across the world to be extraordinary leaders both abroad and in their home communities. Community service is at the heart of each of our programs. Side by side with our local partners, our students extend a hand and learn about the impact of their service. GLA students develop deep and lasting bonds with our partners and leave behind real, positive change. We are committed to making an impact in local communities here in Guatemala. Since the start of our service work in the country in 2010, Global Leadership Adventures has sent 250 student volunteers and tireless staff members to improve the lives of schoolchildren as well as their families and school staff.

Our main project during this time has been restoring and revitalizing the Pacaja elementary school. As we maintained our efforts over the years, local parents and community volunteers joined in to help us more. We rely on our community partnerships to make sure we're connected with the people we serve, so that in addition to the community's generous support and guidance, our student volunteers are able to contribute to a lasting and meaningful impact.

"Working with the kids at the schools where we volunteered was so heartwarming. We were all able to connect with these kids and to feel like we were making an impact."

Gabrielle | Princeton NJ

COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT
Guatemala: Children of the Maya™

“We loved what we were doing as well as each other; we were sharing an experience that would turn into a story to tell for the rest of our lives.”

Sydney D. | Wake Forest, NC
“Working with the kids at the schools where we volunteered was so heartwarming. We were all able to connect with these kids and to feel like we were making an impact.”

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Our Story
Begins in 2010

We began revitalizing the Pacaja elementary school while also beginning our relationship with the local community. Our student volunteers’ efforts went above and beyond their work on the school; each volunteer took a personal interest in connecting with the community.

One of our volunteers, Kevin from New Jersey, illustrates his team’s connection here: “You’re having such an impact on their life and, in turn, they have an even bigger one on yours.” Kevin’s volunteer group not only painted the whole school, they also sanded, painted, and restored 600 desks. Local community members, school staff and the children’s parents began to take notice.

- Restored 600 desks, which had become worn down over years of use
- Repainted the exterior of the school
- Began work on the Pacaja school with local community partner
2011
Turning on the faucets

Our team of student volunteers were once again welcomed by a crowd of enthusiastic schoolchildren. This has become a tradition, which Kevin from last year’s team describes here: “You walk off the bus and see complete strangers who are 10 years younger than you, and they run up and give you a hug—that right there makes you feel great knowing that you’re making these kids’ day just by being there.”

With the desks now restored and the school repainted, GLA staff members worked with community partners to tackle another critical issue at the school: the lack of running water during the school day. With the help of GLA students, 8 new faucets with running water were installed. These trough sinks gave kids at the school a place where they could regularly brush their teeth when they were not able to at home, and wash their hands when they got dirty.

On top of all that, GLA students also built the first classroom addition for the school.

- Built 1st classroom at the Pacaja school
- Installed trough sinks with eight faucets, so children could clean up easily
2012
Expanding our impact

With one classroom expansion project down, the next project would build on that success: to complete a second one. As always, GLA staff coordinated in advance with school leaders to get the project off the ground, and our student volunteers made incredible headway once they arrived in-country. This year marked a turning point in our project: community volunteers began actively lending their support. While our student volunteers installed 70 square meters of sheet rock onto a terrace, the community raised money for a roof, doors, and windows.

In between these two projects, students and local parents came together to paint. The murals they made focused on Xela – the town where the school is based - and what the schoolchildren wanted to do when they got older.

☑ Built 2nd classroom at the Pacaja school
☑ Brought community onboard to contribute a new roof, doors & windows for the classroom
☑ Designed murals with children at the school
2013
Our 3rd classroom goes up

Now that we had established a formidable working relationship with the community, GLA staff, students & our local partners were able to build on that success. Acknowledging the still-limited learning and study space available at the school, the school staff helped us embark on our 3rd classroom addition. so that in addition to the community’s generous support and guidance, our student volunteers are able to contribute to a lasting and meaningful impact.

GLA Guatemala’s local director, Orlando, works with his organization, while using GLA’s aid, to sponsor local school kids in the community, so that they will continue to attend school here at Pacaja. In return for families signing a contract that their children will not drop out of school early, they’re able to provide school supplies and shoes for these children. This has made a big impact on the dropout rate, as families now have the incentive to keep their kids in school and learning.

- Built the 3rd classroom at the Pacaja school
- Continued community involvement with addition of new doors, windows and roof
- Designed new murals with schoolchildren
2014
Building for the future

With three classrooms completed and two more to go, our next team of student volunteers continued with our earlier efforts. But the project this year posed a special challenge, and it took the collaboration of GLA staff and community leaders, and the hard work of our student volunteers, to meet the challenge.

The challenge: to install a large, 10 meters by 4 meters cinder-block and mortar wall that would provide a strong, sound structure on which to complete a 4th classroom. Contractor help was brought in to do the intricate building work, while GLA student volunteers lent their support.

The other big project this year was to bring some of the local culture and history onto the school grounds in a unique way. Schoolchildren joined GLA students in painting a mural representing Guatemala pride. These completed projects paved the way for a brand new classroom in 2015.

☑ Contributed to build of new structural wall for an upcoming 4th classroom
☑ Painted a mural representing Guatemalan pride to share local culture on school grounds
Working with the kids at the schools where we volunteered was so heartwarming. We were all able to connect with these kids and to feel like we were making an impact.

Gabrielle | Princeton NJ

Our local partners in Guatemala are highly experienced working with teens and coordinating with school staff & parent volunteers, which made completing the 4th classroom possible. Community volunteers contributed the roof of the new classroom, as well as windows, while our students supported other parts of the project, including new paint and designs outdoors.

GLA Guatemala’s local director, Orlando, noted community reactions to our students working on such an expansive project – in particular, the young women from GLA they saw doing work that involved physical labor. “The indigenous mothers are very proud to see the girls’ hard work. They say, if they can do it, we can do it.”

With roughly 600 students at the school across 6 grades, the 4th classroom addition really helped to define the impact these projects were making at the school. The 5th and 6th grade students, who were once cramped into much smaller rooms, are now able to learn in these newest and largest classrooms, which are now averaging about 35 students per class.

- Completed the 4th classroom in cooperation with staff and community partners
- Added color and character to the school with designs painted onto the playground
Looking to 2016 & beyond

We are excited to continue our mission of expanding and championing the Pacaja elementary school. We also wish to thank each of our volunteers over these years for their incredible work in building up a school that GLA, our local partners, and especially the community, are proud to call their own.

Next year marks an important new benchmark goal for us: building a 5th room, with the hopes of turning it into a library for the school. GLA Guatemala’s local director, Orlando, hopes to raise funds that will allow him to stock the library with e-readers students can borrow and use to read books and broaden their own horizons at home.

As always, there’s even more to be done! After the new room is completed in 2016, GLA staff and local volunteers will work with our students to help build a rainwater collection system. Currently, the utility only provides water to the school during non-school hours, so this new collection system will give kids and staff at the school access to fresh running water during the school day.

- Complete our 5th room at the school, with the hopes of transforming it into a library
- Construct a rainwater collection system that provides clean water during school hours
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“A call to meaningful service

Every year, GLA is proud to have so many wonderful high school students from around the world come with us to Guatemala to experience all this incredible country has to offer. Not only do these teens visit sacred Lake Atitlan and explore the wonders of Guatemala, but they dedicate their free time in the summer to volunteer - to improve the lives of others.

If you’re interested in joining GLA this coming summer and would like more information, talk to our alumni through our Facebook Group and also check out our Children of the Maya™ page.

“My GLA experience was amazing. I went to Guatemala for two weeks this past summer and I definitely felt like a different person when I returned. Not only did I make friends that I am still in contact with, but I met many Guatemalan children & adults that I will surely never forget.”

Lauren | Richfield, OH