Project Title: Casa Colibrí: Anti-Violence Initiatives for Indigenous Mayan Communities
Institution: University of Pennsylvania Summer 2020-Davis Projects for Peace
Students: Connor Hardy ‘21 - Health and Societies; Gender, Sexuality, Women’s Studies Minor
Heta Patel ‘21 - Health and Societies; Hispanic Studies Minor
Region: Santiago Atitlán, Sololá Department, Guatemala
Non-profits & Partners: Puerta Abierta, Hospitalito Atitlán
Dates: May 31, 2020-August 1, 2020

Background
Santiago Atitlán, a Tz’utujil Maya town located in the Sololá Department of Guatemala, has a rich cultural history, complicated by decades of political unrest and post-war recovery. The Guatemalan Civil War (1960-96) had a lasting impact on women’s safety and gender dynamics in Guatemala, especially in rural and Indigenous communities. Over 200,000 people, 83% of whom were ethnic Mayan, were killed or disappeared during the war. Violence against women and rates of femicide were at an all-time high during this period, and the issues persist to this day. In fact, Guatemala has the 3rd highest femicide rate in the world. Because of the unique combination of high rates of normalized violence against women and Indigenous groups, women in the town of Santiago Atitlán are especially vulnerable. In rural Indigenous communities, there is a history of conflict, low rates of educational attainment among women and girls, and a prevailing culture of machismo.

While visiting Santiago Atitlán as participants in the Guatemala Health Initiative—a global health collaboration between Penn and Hospitalito Atitlán—the profound impact of violence on the women we met was striking. Even though we were asked to conduct interviews about nutrition and diabetes in Santiago and surrounding towns by the hospital, the issue of domestic violence often surfaced during conversations with women and mothers, who expressed a desire for services to address the issue. Although violence has a significant impact on the lives of Indigenous women in Guatemala, there is limited access to mental health and domestic violence services, especially in rural communities. As of 2018, only 13 of the 22 separate courts to address violence against women are in operation. After months of planning and discussion with local leaders, we have put together a collaborative initiative to address and mitigate violence in Santiago Atitlán.

Project Description, Objectives, and Implementation
We founded Casa Colibrí in September 2019 with 3 Tz’utujil nonprofit leaders (Juanita, Mari, and Isa) and 1 social worker from North Carolina (Jen). Our organization aims to increase domestic violence awareness, foster empowerment, and provide services to vulnerable populations. This summer, we plan to achieve the following:

1. Casa Colibrí Safe House: As Santiago Atitlán does not currently have a domestic violence shelter, we plan to establish a pilot safe house for people affected by violence. In order to accomplish this, we will rent a fully furnished home, which has already been identified by contacts in Santiago, with 3 bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom, and washing facilities. We will stay in one of the bedrooms and serve as full-time staff in the house, while the other two bedrooms will be allocated to house persons affected by violence. The first 3 weeks will be devoted to purchasing furniture and setting up necessary materials: blankets, foodstuffs, personal care items, etc. During this time, we will also inform local health facilities and community centers of the safe house. The location will be kept confidential and a hotline phone number will be included in flyers. We will be in charge of managing the local hotline, which will be purchased upon arrival, and directing callers to the safehouse as needed. With the support of Juanita, Mari, and Isa, we will also be responsible for referring residents to appropriate services.

2. Psychological Services: Casa Colibrí will offer individual/group therapy and referrals to persons affected by violence at Hospitalito Atitlán. Juanita and Mari are Tz’utujil- and Spanish-speaking licensed psychologists volunteering their time to provide services. We will coordinate therapy appointments and manage administrative tasks and outreach.

3. We plan to develop educational lessons for:
**Children:** We will partner with Puerta Abierta, an innovative learning center, to lead a monthly workshop series for primary school-aged children. Lesson plans will involve interactive activities on mental health, the denormalization and recognition of abuse, and empowerment. Juanita, Mari and Isa, as leaders and educators of Puerta Abierta, will ensure that material we craft is culturally sound and age-appropriate.

**Low-income mothers:** The Mother’s Artisan Group provides a source of income to mothers of Puerta Abierta students. We will develop a monthly workshop series focused on women’s rights and empowerment, mental health, domestic violence recognition, and routes of assistance. We will facilitate Spanish-language workshops, which may be interpreted into Tz’utujil by Juanita and Mari. This will also serve as an opportunity for us to recommend mothers to the safe house or other services.

**At-risk pregnant women:** Hospitalito Atitlán’s Maternal Infant program provides free health services to at-risk pregnant women. During monthly program meetings, we will present on topics related to domestic violence, empowerment, mental health, and routes of assistance. We will present materials in Tz’utujil and Spanish, and may serve as an opportunity to refer people to counseling we are facilitating.

**Rural health promoters:** Health and Prenatal Clinic Days are monthly clinics in which the hospital provides training to local health promoters. We will provide domestic violence and mental health awareness trainings so that providers can more sensitively care for their patients. They will be also given Casa Colibrí’s contact information to pass on to clients that they think would benefit from our services.

**Project Sustainability**

Three of the six inaugural members of Casa Colibrí are from Santiago Atitlán, live there throughout the year, and are willing to provide volunteer services. They speak Tz’utujil and Spanish, have training in psychology and law, and have been part of nonprofit work in the region for a significant amount of time. This means that the programming that begins over the summer could be sustained throughout the year. Educational and marketing materials are also reusable. During the summer, we will evaluate the success of the pilot house and plans will be made to sustain it post-summer based on observed need. As such, we will train and designate appropriate staff to run the shelter as necessary. Furthermore, we plan to expand our partnership network to include organizations such as Women’s Justice Initiative, Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres, Salvando Madres, etc. in order to ensure the success of our future efforts.

**Previous Experiences & Qualifications**

**Connor Hardy** has been involved in a range of groups and activities related to gender-based and sexual violence prevention, on-campus and in Philadelphia: she is involved in Penn VDay, Consent Collaborative, and some grassroots organizing. In 2018, Connor started volunteering at WOAR -- Philadelphia Center Against Sexual Violence, where she completed Pennsylvania Sexual Assault Counselor Training. Connor learned about issues specific to Indigenous communities through her participation in the Graduate School of Education course on Indigenous Education. She wrote her final project for the course on language priorities in Santiago Atitlán in a medical context. Connor speaks Spanish fluently and has experience assisting community health workers in a rural Indigenous community in Peru. She is passionate about conflict resolution, especially as it relates to violence in communities. Last fall, she was one of twenty-one young leaders selected to participate in the Salaam Fellowship for Conflict Resolution, which included a 10-day conference in Morocco that focused on negotiation, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution.

**Heta Patel** has been involved in anti-violence efforts for several years. In high school, she volunteered at her local domestic violence shelter, raised awareness about teen dating violence by creating a PSA with her peers, and taught survivors lessons on various health topics. As a result of her work and research with persons affected by domestic abuse and human trafficking, she is familiar with not only the issues at hand, but also how to engage with survivors of violence sensitively. Her experience working with MEDLIFE, a NGO based in Peru, has augmented her familiarity with community development projects. During the summer of 2019, Heta participated in a 10-week field experience living with a host family in Santiago Atitlán and conducting research for Hospitalito Atitlán. As a result of her time there, she has nurtured strong ties to our NGO partners and obtained a strong understanding of the Indigenous Maya culture. She hopes to use her academic background and fluency in Spanish as well as her past advocacy and teaching experiences to promote peace for the residents of Santiago Atitlán.