



Local Hope Guatemala and Volunteers to Inaugurate Open Wide Legacy Dental Clinic

By Conexiant News Staff
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Volunteer Trips for Dental Clinics -- April 14-20 and May 4-12

When Elmer Mazariegos was 9 years old, his parents were faced with a terrible decision: Take their ailing son to a dentist, or, feed their family of 11 that week. The painful, tangerine-sized bulge in Elmer's left cheek due to a tooth abscess went untreated until the tooth finally fell out several months later. It's a choice parents should never have to make, and pain no child should have to endure. Yet 30 years later, there is still no consistent source of dental care in Elmer's village in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. That's about to change.

This April, Local Hope Guatemala, a 32-year-old non-profit organization providing healthcare and other critical services in Elmer's community, will inaugurate the Open Wide Legacy Dental Clinic. The new facility will be located within Local Hope's Xela AID Community Clinic. The Open Wide facility will be the first in the area to offer professional dental care on an ongoing basis. It will be inaugurated during a volunteer trip April 14-20 of this year.

The new dental facility was made possible by Legacy members of the former Open Wide Foundation, and The Rotary Foundation, in partnership with Local Hope. Founded in 2011, by Dr. Glen Wysel, Lisa Wysel, and Imtiaz Manji, Open Wide Foundation's vision was to redefine humanitarian dentistry by bringing long-term oral health solutions to the most vulnerable communities in Guatemala, beyond the traditional acute-care model usually focused on short-term, emergency care. Open Wide volunteers, donors and industry partners provided support for three public dental clinics, served more than 250,000 patients, sponsored more than 1,100 volunteer trips, and mentored more than 500 Guatemalan dental students. Thwarted by Covid, the Open Wide Foundation closed in 2021, but its invaluable work promises to continue to flourish via the work of Local Hope.

The Wysels and Manji generously underwrote the new dental suite: "We are honored to contribute our knowledge and experience to help support the new dental clinic in Xela Aid

Center. It is gratifying to us that through this effort, the legacy of Open Wide continues, making sustainable dental care within reach of those who need it most.”

The Rotary Foundation (TRF) provides Global Grants to support a range of health and social concerns. Through the Global Grant “Health for All,” spearheaded by the Rotary Clubs of Placentia, California, and Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, TRF funding is supporting a year-round dentist to work out of Local Hope’s new dental facility, along with numerous other upgrades to the Xela AID Clinic.

Prior to the influx of funding, dental care at Local Hope’s Xela AID Clinic, located in the indigenous village of San Martin Chiquito, had been intermittent, with visits by volunteer dentists up to several times per month over the past three years. This new, permanent facility with a paid dentist will guarantee regular dental care, both as follow-up to special dental missions such as those being held April 14-20 and May 4-12, and for much-needed ongoing dental care for local residents.

“We feel exceptionally fortunate for having crossed paths with Glen and Lisa and our other friends who have dedicated so many years to establishing Open Wide,” said Mel Dinkel, COO of Local Hope. “Their support, expertise and network of dentists will allow us to provide an exceptionally high quality of care to a community that has never before had access to professional dentistry.”

“All are welcome to join these volunteer missions – members of the dental community, as well as the general public interested in humanitarian service,” noted Leslie Baer Dinkel, Local Hope’s CEO. “Each trip is customized to the skills and interests of every participant, who will meet and work side-by-side with Mayan community members, learn about their rich culture and undergo a life-changing experience -- both for them and the people they serve.”

In addition to dentistry, Local Hope will match talent and interest with need so that volunteers will be able to participate in many other important service projects and cultural activities. This could include practicing English or teaching art or computer classes to children, experiencing life in a local home, partaking in Mayan cooking classes, building and distributing chicken coops to families in need, learning about the ancient art of backstrap weaving, experiencing an authentic Mayan “Day Keeping” ceremony, and more.

For the April trip, besides service work, volunteers will also experience the magnificent colonial city of Antigua, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built in the shadow of three volcanos. They will enjoy Central Park with its renown Italian Renaissance-inspired grid, iconic fountain, and wide selection of boutique coffee shops. During the May trip, participants will also visit Antigua, plus Lake Atitlan — arguably one of the most beautiful places in the world—to relax, explore indigenous villages around the lake, hike a volcano, zip-line through the valleys, or shop in local markets.

Service trip information – <https://xelaaid.org/volunteer>

- April 14-20: 7 days/6 nights (with optional nights for early arrival and next-day departure). Antigua and San Martín Chiquito. Cost: \$1,853 double occupancy (single occupancy \$2,243)
- May 4-12: 9 days/8 nights (with optional nights for early arrival and next-day departure). Antigua, San Martín Chiquito and Lake Atitlan. Cost: \$2,159 double occupancy (single occupancy \$2,679).

For more information about the trips: <https://xelaaid.org/volunteer> or call Mel Dinkel, (714) 322-0974.

Founded in 1992, Local Hope, known in Guatemala as Xela AID (Agency for Integrated Development), is a not-for-profit organization that provides a range of 18 proven programs spanning health care, education, career development and related support serving largely indigenous populations in poverty belts in Guatemala. We team with organizations, locally and abroad, who share values consistent with our mission, to empower families and communities to become healthy, educated and self-reliant. The expenses of our programs are supported by donations from individuals and foundations, healthy sources of earned income, and endowment income. Because our earned income covers all administrative expenses, 100% of all donations are applied to fuel our programs that provide direct assistance.

