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2013-2015 Friendship Bridge Sustained Grant Report: Advanced Education Training for Impoverished Guatemalan Women



Organization: Friendship Bridge
Grant Amount: \$50,825
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Otilia was born into a poor family, was abused by her father, and was not allowed to attend school. When she became an adult, she moved to the city of Quiche to build a better life for herself and her five children. She started a business selling household items, but the profits were small. She eventually joined a Friendship Bridge Trust Bank, and with the other members' support, Otilia attended Advanced Education and learned about canning vegetables and making jams.

Inspired by what she learned, Otilia developed her own jam recipe. Her first sales



were extremely successful, and nearby shops and bakeries began placing orders. To keep up with her business success, Otilia hired two employees. She has received numerous awards for her products and has been invited to share about her success in Guatemala City and even in Los Angeles.

To Otilia, though, the greatest success is being able to send her children to school – something she never had the opportunity to do. Otilia also belongs to three different community groups and often shares her story and her successes with her community. She attributes her business and personal success to Friendship

Bridge, and she says that this is the best time of her life.

Clients, like Otilia, continually motivate us to expand *Microcredit Plus* to more women, more families, and more communities. Ultimately, *Microcredit Plus* benefits the client as well as an average of six others in the community, including spouses, children, parents and employees.

You can learn more about Otilia and her success through Friendship Bridge's program in a [short video here](#).

Advanced Education Program Overview

As a supplement to our *Microcredit Plus* program, we began offering the Advanced Education Training program in 2012 as clients were expressing their desire to learn more advanced skillsets. The Advanced Education Training program is free of charge for the client and is primarily aimed at those who have demonstrated

significant motivation, leadership, and interest in growing their businesses. This program includes mentoring and coaching, as well as skills training, with the goals that these women strengthen their skills, increase their incomes by applying the new skill, and become empowered, self-sufficient leaders.



The Advanced Education Training program is promoted at local branches when our clients meet for their monthly Trust Bank meetings. From there, participants of the program are identified as those clients who have demonstrated significant motivation, leadership, and interest in growing their businesses. Many of our female clients are indigenous and live in remote, rural areas and would not otherwise have an opportunity to learn these specialized skills.

We currently work with 11 Guatemala-based organizations and individual partners to provide the courses. Two of our long-standing partnerships have been with Las Graveleas, a local leader in culinary arts training, and FUNDAP, who combine artisan training courses with business management skills. Individual consultants also provide trainings in the communities, often in the homes of the participants. One of the individual providers is a former Friendship Bridge client. The trainings generally consist of a two-day (room and board included) stay at a facility for courses such as baking, canning and preserving, and jewelry making. During the two-day trainings, clients learn how to produce new, high quality products that can later be replicated and sold. The trainings also include education on financial planning and business marketing. Friendship Bridge covers the cost of the training, averaging \$45 per client, and arranges all logistics and transportation to the training facility. In most cases, clients receive a “starter kit” that includes basic materials required to put into practice the new skills, allowing them to begin generating revenue from it immediately.

Through the 2013-2015 Sustained grant provided by Dining for Women, Friendship Bridge has grown the Advanced Education Training program by 45% from 2013 to



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2015. We've also been able to exceed our goals of growing the program over the past three years. In 2015, our goal was to enroll 1,000 clients; 1,138 participated. In 2016, we aim to have 1,500 women participate.

Our Impact

Through monitoring and evaluation efforts, we have seen results of this program in various forms, such as clients adopting and strengthening basic knowledge of budgets and business plans, developing new products, and generating new revenue. In addition to data on poverty levels collected using the Progress out of Poverty Index (PPI), we have utilized specific survey data from participants in the Advanced Education program that includes questions on the application of skills learned, income and revenue levels, new products developed, and satisfaction in the program.

From this program's specific survey data, results show us there is a significant relationship between the number of trainings clients attend and the positive change in clients' poverty score (meaning they are less poor). Seventy percent of clients surveyed reported applying what they learned (53% in their businesses, 47% in the family). Furthermore, our retention rate among clients who utilize advanced trainings is six to seven percentage points higher than clients who have not participated in the program.

Through data collected across our client base, we have found that clients who utilized a Plus service, such as Advanced Education, are found to have a 4% higher poverty score, meaning they are less poor (measured by the PPI). Ninety percent of clients surveyed have also reported taking on a leadership role since becoming a Friendship Bridge client. This data reinforces our theory that through continued participation, clients are aspiring for a better future and are more able to achieve their objectives.

Ultimately, Advanced Education Training provides our clients with the opportunity to gain a skillset for life, not just in the year of the training. This skillset can be applied directly in their businesses to generate additional income. And, as mentioned previously, participation in our *Plus* programs benefit the client as well as an average of six others in the community, including spouses, children, parents and employees.

Therefore, the additional skills learned in the Advanced Education Training program will at least double the impact these women are making- manifesting itself through leadership positions our clients take on and becoming a change-maker within the community.



Challenges and Program Improvements

A key factor in the success of this program has been the ability of our staff to identify challenges and respond to them. The distance between our clients’ communities and the training centers has always been a considerable barrier to participation. We have continuously found providers that can travel to the clients’ communities so that our clients do not need to devote extra time away from businesses, homes, and children. This has been a major change and improvement to the program, as we now have 11 training partners in several regions we work.

Another challenge has been that some clients may not have all the supplies and equipment needed to implement what they have learned. The trainings have increasingly begun focusing on providing techniques that can be easily replicated in the clients’ homes and that do not require specialized equipment. We also provide a basic kit of supplies after every training.

While we have been able to grow the program, we have also been able to reduce costs. The cost per client to participate in Advance Trainings has reduced because we have been able to expand our partnerships with a goal to have training partners available in more local communities so that it is easier and less expensive for clients to attend. We have learned that clients are more willing to participate if the trainings are shorter and closer to their homes so that they do not have to miss work or time with their families. This also limits the costs of transportation, lodging, and meals that Friendship Bridge provides when clients travel to the trainings.

Use of Funds

As we began to expand the program in 2013, funds were used to cover expenses associated with trainings, program services, and delivery costs. In addition, we hired three Client Advocates who began administering surveys with clients and collecting data on the effectiveness of our programs. In 2013, a total of 18,920 surveys were conducted. DFW grant funds were used to cover salaries and benefits, as well as additional costs related to the Client Advocates. Finally, funds were used to support training for the education staff on curriculum design, client protection principles, and our credit policy.

In 2014 and 2015, grant funds were used specifically for the costs related to the Advanced Education Trainings, which included the course, materials, logistics, and room/board.

Use of Funds	Year	Amount Spent
Trainings, Client Advocates, Staff Training	2013	\$15,000
Costs for 298 Clients to	2014	\$20,825



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Participate		
Costs for 300 Clients to Participate	2015	\$15,000
	Total Spent	\$50,825

With support from DFW, Friendship Bridge has been able to grow the Advanced Education Training program over the past three years. It has become a pathway to empowerment for thousands of impoverished Guatemalan women. We truly appreciate your investment in our efforts to achieve our mission.