



**MAIA**  
her infinite impact

## **Final Report 2016-2018 Dining for Women**

**Organization:** MAIA (Formerly Starfish One by One)

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**Project Name:** Connecting talent with opportunity among Girl Pioneers in rural Guatemala

**Grant Start Date:** 4/15/2015

**Kind of Grant (Featured or Sustained Program):** February 2016-2018 Sustained Program

1. Recap briefly what outcomes the program was designed to achieve.

MAIA set out to create a school that through strategic partnerships and continual innovation would set a new bar for what rural education for girls can be. This school concept leveraged MAIA's existing knowledge and success in the field of girls' empowerment to create an educational experience unlike anything offered in Guatemala. The Impact School would wrap MAIA's effective socioemotional programming within a rigorous educational setting explicitly designed to connect girls from traditionally marginalized areas with 21st-century opportunities to unlock their infinite impact.

2. What was accomplished in connection with this project? Please address each stated objective. If any project objectives were changed, please also explain the circumstances leading to the modification of the objective(s).

The vision of the Impact School was to create a lightning rod of evidence-based best practices that prove several critical concepts in Guatemala:

- *Using local talent, redefine the role of "educator" in the Guatemalan context. This entails deviating from the known model of "teacher" (which in Guatemala is a job often noted for its passivity and rigid adherence to the status quo) by creating and utilizing high-impact educators with vivid clarity of objectives and intentionality in the classroom.*
  - A variety of collaborations with different external innovators resulted in training visits from MAIA educators to El Salvador (literacy/critical thinking), North Carolina (math), Colorado (math), and MAIA's participation in the 2019 NCIM International Math Conference in San Diego, CA.
  - Currently, there are two generations of educators with classroom experience. All are at or beyond the university level. Educator retention is 100% since 2017.
- *Redefine the word "school" for all stakeholders by evidencing what a quality education can achieve in both its process and result. Students and families are accustomed to schools being foreign entities (parents most often lack sufficient Spanish to speak with teachers) that can provoke fear and alienation. The MAIA Impact School, with its indigenous staff and*

*celebration of Mayan identity and community, will foster an unprecedented partnership with parents who will also receive support in their homes.*

- In 2017-2018, JUCONI Mexico conducted four visits to Guatemala to impart a course in positive family communication for MAIA staff
  - In 2018, MAIA completed the construction of the Impact School building, arguably the region's highest-quality building that visibly raises the bar of standards and expectations around rural girls' education.
  - In 2019, the Impact School began its third year for 150 Girl Pioneers and families in grades 7-9 and began preparing to launch the first year of high school (10th grade in 2020).
  - In 2019, MAIA was awarded the 2019 Zayed Sustainability Prize. This award recognizes MAIA as the most "innovative and inclusive" school in the Americas.
- *Infuse national secondary school curriculum with "real world" skills through consultation with experts and private sector entities. In contrast to the typical secondary school education (average of 600 classroom hours/year), the MAIA Impact School will have approximately 1600 annual hours of instruction to significantly complement the national curriculum with tangible skill development and practice.*
    - Formative assessment approach and tools in place: MAIA has implemented several international platforms to monitor the progress of each Girl Pioneer. These include Achieve 3000 (for math), Lexile (for literacy), PowerSchool (for grades), PAIRING (for competencies) and Salesforce (for long-term student tracking).
    - Since 2017, MAIA directors and staff have attended networking events in Washington, DC; Mexico, NYC, Costa Rica, Denver, and Dubai.
    - Since 2018, MAIA has hosted trainings for over 40 schools and NGOs on the subjects of critical thinking, vocal empowerment, and STEM for girls.
  - *Attract, select, and bring on board high-aptitude girls from motivated families.*
    - In January 2019, a Girl Pioneer named Ester was the first student to travel abroad to represent MAIA in Dubai.
    - Girl Pioneers and MAIA staff regularly participate in events in Guatemala City that focus on educating marketing professionals on the subject of inclusive marketing.
    - Annual school retention rate is 98%.

3. What challenges did you face in connection with this project? How did you address these challenges?

The road to creating the MAIA Impact School has certainly had its bumps. From the beginning, we were warned by many of our mentors to "just survive" year 1 (and we would give that same advice to others). We doubled our student body in year 2, while overseeing construction of the new school. We now have a semblance of hindsight and can acknowledge that we underestimated the power of several variables. In spite of creating an exhaustive list of "what if" scenarios, we still confront situations that we could never have imagined three years ago.

*There are more variables than we could have imagined*—In spite of all the warnings, we were still overwhelmed by the number of issues that arose when our wraparound program transitioned into full-time schooling.

*Investing in systems to manage data is not the same as knowing how to use them*—Through the support from Dining for Women and other institutional funding, MAIA acquired cutting-edge data management systems for formative evaluation of Girl Pioneers. We underestimated a critical requirement necessary for making these systems work effectively. Girl Pioneers start school without any IT skills. Most assessments are electronic and online. As a result, the integrity of initial assessments was questionable since user error was highly likely.

*Investment in local talent can unlock local talent*—As products of the deficient Guatemalan public education system, MAIA educators require intensive investment in their ongoing training, coaching, and professional development to maintain the high-quality educational standards that MAIA strives for. MAIA's full commitment to same-gender/same-race mirroring of staff and students makes teacher preparation paramount. Educators have all completed at least 1,500 hours of training, receive continual coaching from international experts, and provide an education that draws from the top resources in the world.

4. Is your organization or program situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant program staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes?

In 2018, MAIA conducted a full organizational rebrand that resonates with staff and students while effectively communicating its work. When our organization began supporting young women in rural Guatemala to continue their education and develop leadership skills, the metaphor from the parable of the starfish embodied the scope of the work we were doing. As we have grown, our organizational philosophy has evolved, and so have our programs and goals. With the construction of the new Impact School building in Sololá, we viewed the change as a prime opportunity to align our work with a name that fit the energy and ambition of Girl Pioneers, families, and staff.

Maia is one of the brightest stars in the night sky. The new logo represents the star, which in Mayan culture symbolizes the equilibrium between people, energy, thoughts, and ideas. It's also a visual presentation of the four cardinal points, which symbolize balance in the Mayan Cosmovision and are prominently featured in Mayan blessing ceremonies.

5. What were the most important lessons learned?

*The value of specific goals to guide decision-making*—MAIA was extremely fortunate to stumble across invaluable advice several years ago when the school was merely a concept. The Director of KIPP Houston visited with the leadership team in Guatemala and underscored the essential role that numeric goals play in the design and implementation process. He cautioned us about the floodgate of decisions that would come. With his help, MAIA developed the four

organizational goals for graduates that continue to play a fundamental role in all decisions. As schools now approach MAIA for advice, the value of these goals is even more evident.

*Strategic partnerships have been crucial, but not all partnerships have been strategic*—We have leaned heavily on external partnerships to move forward. The model of the school depends on MAIA’s consistently accessing and introducing relevant innovations to our human resources. This formula has been extremely effective in areas like math, family work, and vocal empowerment. We underestimated the amount of time that the management of these relationships would require. Each relationship requires constant stewardship and feedback to maximize the opportunity. This is challenging when staff members are also busy building out the school and trying to systematize what they are doing. Management of external relationships is a task that continues to grow as more innovators approach the school with interest in introducing a new methodology.

*Don’t shortchange organizational culture*—MAIA dedicates significant staff time to wellness and culture. This entails activities like very active WhatsApp communications, regular meetings to foster personal-care techniques, continual celebrations, and quarterly retreats. To the external eye, this may appear inefficient. However, we have learned that these spaces are essential to sustain the energy required to push forward the rigor of the school. MAIA staff work 40-50 hours per week, and most attend university on weekends. Many are the primary breadwinners in their families, and all confront powerful headwinds as pioneers themselves. The investment in this time is directly related to high levels of staff retention and motivation.

*Don’t underestimate the value of empowered local governance*—Lessons from around the world—notably the horrific [case of abuse](#) in a network of schools for girls in Liberia—highlight the importance of having on-the-ground governance to help navigate the local and national landscape. This is not easy since it defies traditional INGO governance design (which frequently features a governance board in the US and a symbolic local counterpart entity). MAIA’s experience in confronting political pressures, leveraging board members for important spaces of communication, and embodying the mission of local capacity reflect the value of this time investment.

*The School Effectiveness Plan (SEP) has been a critical factor in maintaining sanity*—One of our external innovators (from ADGN consultants) introduced the SEP tool to MAIA in 2015. The SEP is a framework to track what otherwise seems to be an infinite number of tasks. By dividing the work into four main fields (culture & climate, distribution of resources, learning environments, and highly effective systems) and assigning dates and staff to specific tasks, the SEP created the essential levels of accountability and monitoring that keeps MAIA on track.

*Saying “no” is painful and essential*—Organizations like MAIA are created to address unmet needs. Iterating on MAIA’s experience with the wraparound program as well as previous years of school selection inform the selection procedure. Narrowing down the scope of who can access our school is an annual and often-dreaded process. Consequently, MAIA staff often turn away deserving young women and families that do not fit the set profile. This short-term conflict

and pain are not to be underestimated; however, it is proving to be worthwhile over the long term.

6. What has changed within your organization as a result of this project?

The biggest change within MAIA is the pace of change within Girl Pioneers. Prior to opening the school, MAIA represented an important but complementary component of a young woman's journey through secondary school. The advent of the Impact School means MAIA is among the primary features in a Girl Pioneer's life. As a result, the pace of positive change is accelerated. After just one year, Girl Pioneers in the school evidence use of competencies at a pace that previously required years.

7. Describe the unexpected events and outcomes, including unexpected benefits.

At the time of proposing the Sustained Impact Grant, MAIA could not have predicted the construction of what is today the Impact School. The scale and quality of the building far exceed anything we imagined. Similarly, MAIA has been surprised by the level of external interest from other organizations.

8. Did you change your strategy as a result of obstacles you encountered? How will you address these challenges in the future?

*The challenges to our philosophy around "local talent unlocking local talent"*—MAIA remains committed to investing in local talent and recognizes that this can make things more difficult, but it also ensures replicability. As MAIA prepares its educators to instruct high school-level academic content, MAIA needed to hire some non-local experts to help invest in preparing local staff for the task at hand. This included hiring two experts in science and math (who have worked in several of Guatemala City's elite private schools) to provide content coaching, professional development and curriculum development.

9. Approximately how many lives have been touched, both directly and indirectly, by the program?

Between 2016 and 2018, MAIA partnered with 219 girls and families in the wraparound program model of scholarships and mentorship, and 146 girls and families in the Impact School. Given the depth of family work, MAIA considers parents and siblings as direct beneficiaries. The average family has eight members. This brings the total number directly served by this project to 2,920 people.

As an innovation platform, MAIA connects external innovators with organizations and schools from across Guatemala to create a community of learning. Our school was designed and built to facilitate this process. Since 2016, over 40 organizations and schools have accessed innovations in an array of girl-focused trainings through MAIA. The clients and participants of these organizations are all indirect beneficiaries of the MAIA Impact School program.

10. What are the measurements used to monitor success and how was this information measured (e.g., surveys, observation)? Be specific and include measurable results.

MAIA measures the impact and success of our programs through four overarching long-term organizational goals: 1) economic autonomy, 2) a family on her terms, 3) lifelong learning with at least 15 years of schooling, and 4) unlocking leadership potential. All of our programming is aligned with these areas of impact, and each goal is monitored through incremental growth measured annually to ensure each Girl Pioneer is on a trajectory to meet her true potential. MAIA uses both qualitative and quantitative assessment tools. See the attached chart for detailed results (Monitoring and Evaluation of Grant Activities and Results).

11. If the program is ongoing, provide plans and expected results, including projected timeframe.

MAIA is now preparing to launch the first year of high school in 2020. We hired Lidia Oxi to design and lead the high school. We have established the goals—to prepare graduates to pass university entrance exams and obtain formal employment—and the path to getting there, including formal internship opportunities during the final year and English language instruction during all six years.

12. Provide a detailed list of all expenses incurred during the grant cycle which have been paid for with the Dining for Women grant.

See attached Financial Report

13. Did this grant and relationship with DFW assist your organization in obtaining other funding, partnerships with other organizations, or public recognition in some capacity?

DFW's support and community have been essential elements for MAIA's success to date, and DFW's credibility has enhanced MAIA's ability to connect with other institutional donors. DFW's geographic diversity of chapters—and the numerous chapters that have visited MAIA—has also supported MAIA to expand its reputation throughout the US.