

Progreso Apoyo Program: 2020—A year like no other...

The year 2020 was only the second year of operations for the Progreso Apoyo Program and *Oh, what a year it was!*

We started the year successfully recruiting 28 new sponsors, enabling us to add 28 new students to our program, and bringing our total to **52 students who are receiving support through Progreso Apoyo.** We had a very successful Home Tour in March and we were notified that our project to purchase computers for the three public middle schools in Progreso was selected for funding by **Rotary International.**

And then... Covid-19 slammed into our world and everything changed immediately. This newsletter provides an update on how the Progreso Apoyo Program quickly shifted gears to help our students and their families respond to the challenges of the year 2020 and our plans to navigate through the uncertainties of 2021.



Support for Distance Learning

All schools in Mexico shut down abruptly in mid-March 2020 and in early summer, the federal government announced that schools would operate through distance learning through at least the second quarter of 2021. Students would be required to stay home, connect with their teachers via the Internet, and receive their lessons through a variety of technologies including television, WhatsApp, email and Google Classroom. Each school, and even each teacher, was able to determine the most effective way to reach out to their students. But one thing we at PAP knew for sure: without reliable access to the Internet, *our students were going to have difficulties succeeding in this new environment.*

The Progreso Apoyo Board responded to the challenge by using a portion of sponsor funds to **subsidize the cost of Internet access for all 52 of our students.** Rather than purchase a full year’s worth of uniforms and school supplies, we used sponsor funds to help each family pay their monthly Internet or cell-phone bill. We received very generous donations from two of our sponsors and—combined with the sponsor funds—we are able to pay for Internet access through the end of the school year in June 2021 if necessary.

Next, we heard from both our students and the schools that it would be more difficult for students to succeed in distance learning using the small screens available on a cell phone. We asked our sponsors and the local community for

help and many of you stepped up – in two short weeks we were able to raise enough funds to **purchase 10-inch tablets for all 52 of our students!**



We know that we are making a difference in the ability of our students to succeed during this difficult year. In the grade reports for the first semester of the school year, September thru December 2020, **more than 90% of our students maintained a Grade Point Average of 8 or better (out of 10).** In fact, fully half of our students (28) have a GPA of 9 or better (out of 10). Two of our students received scores of 10 and one of these received the top grades for her class at Benito Juarez Middle School!

You can read more about how we helped our students succeed in distance learning by visiting our website at <http://progresoapoyoprogram.org/?p=357>.

English Language Programs

In the fall of 2019, the Director of Carlos Marx, Progreso’s largest middle-school, asked the Progreso Apoyo Program if we could find volunteers to help teach English to their students on Saturday mornings. **About 20 volunteers helped teach more than 100 students between September 2019 and March 2020.** Covid-19 abruptly closed the schools in March 2020 and in-person English-language program ended for the year.

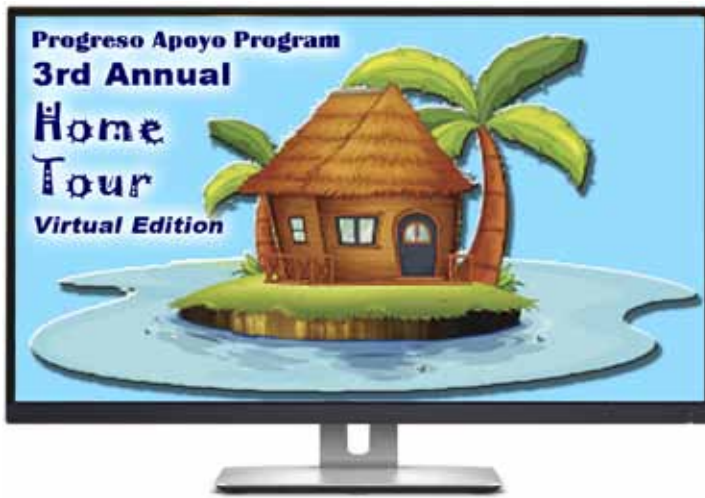


Virtual English Program coach Debbie Ritchie online with her student

In order to continue to help some of our students practice English, in November 2020 we recruited volunteers who would be willing to help our students using a combination of the popular language-learning app Duolingo and weekly conversational practice held using Google Meet. Once again our community stepped up and as of the end of December 2020, **we have matched 21 of our students with English “coaches” located in Progreso, the US and Canada.** Our Virtual English Program provides our students with an extra opportunity to practice speaking English while they are studying at home.

A look at the year ahead

We anticipate that 2021 will continue to present some challenges for our community and our families. But we are planning for a very special “Virtual Home Tour” for March 2021, and are excited about the opportunity to finally begin to work on the Computers for Progress Project!



Third Annual Home Tour—Virtual Edition!

For the past two years, the Progreso Apoyo Program has hosted a very successful Home Tour which helps us raise money to operate our civil association and provide support for our students beyond what the sponsor funds provide. For example, some of the proceeds from the 2020 Home Tour were used to **purchase food baskets for our families in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic** when many were suffering great economic hardship.



In 2021, the Progreso Apoyo Program Home Tour is going virtual! In recognition that the pandemic is not yet contained, we are going to produce an original pay-per-view video that will feature several homes not just in Progreso, but in surrounding communities that otherwise would not be a part of this event. Stay tuned for more information about our **Third Annual Home Tour—Virtual Edition** which will be available in March 2021!

“Computers for Progress” Project

There are about 1,700 students in three public middle schools we work with, and three computer labs with no computers in them! Imagine, in this day and age of ever-increasing connectivity, our middle school students do not have access to the basic tools of technology—computers!

To address this need, the Progreso Apoyo Program is pleased to announce a **partnership with Rotary Clubs in Mexico and the USA to purchase computers for each of the three public middle schools in Progreso.** The “Computers for Progress” project has been selected as

part of the “100 for 100” funding initiative that celebrates 100 years of Rotary Club’s involvement in Mexico by sponsoring 100 projects throughout the country.



This project is co-sponsored by the **Merida English Rotary Club** and the **Club Rotario Ejecutivo de Progreso** and endorsed by **Rotary Club District 4195** (which covers southeast Mexico). 400 project proposals were submitted, and we were selected by **Rotary Club District 6460** in western Illinois for support.

Over the next few months, Rotary Clubs around the USA and Mexico will be raising money to purchase computers for our schools. We received a very generous and timely donation of professional video services from Jeremy and Jillian Hinkston, who produced this informative video for us: take a look! <https://youtu.be/-wFKJRA0YQ>


A humble thank you to our sponsors and supporters


This was a challenging year for everyone. But it was as successful as possible due to the generosity of our sponsors and others who provided financial and other support to our program. **Thank you, everyone, and we look forward to a healthy and successful 2021!**



The Progreso Apoyo Program Board of Directors:

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 Facebook: Progreso Apoyo Program

 Web: progresoapoyoprogram.org

 Email: info@progresoapoyo.org