

# PRESS RELEASE

## For Immediate Release

**Three local Northumberland organizations return from Guatemala knowledge exchange with lessons on the power of collaboration to tackle gender violence**

**Cobourg, ON [Sep 25 2018] - Horizons of Friendship (Horizons)**, a non-profit international development organization, **Cornerstone Family Violence Prevention Centre (Cornerstone)**, and the **Cobourg Police Service (CPS)** have returned from a 10-day knowledge exchange to Guatemala where strategies to prevent and respond to gender violence were shared between the Canadian organizations, Guatemalan institutions and civil society members—including Indigenous Maya community leaders.

The exchange formed part of Horizons and its Guatemalan partner **PIES's (the Association for Health Promotion, Research and Education)** multi-million dollar project to strengthen maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) for tens of thousands of Indigenous Maya women, children and families in the province of Tonicapán, Guatemala. The MNCH project, under a co-share funding agreement between the **Government of Canada** and Horizons, and carried out in close collaboration with **Guatemalan Ministry of Health** programming, encompasses efforts to end gender-based violence.

Cornerstone Executive Director, **Nancy Johnston**, Child & Youth Community Counsellor/Family Court Support Worker, **Lucy Caldwell**, and CPS Acting Staff Sergeant **Brent Allison** joined Horizons staff on a full schedule of meetings and sessions involving actors across all levels of Guatemalan society:

- Horizons partner **AFEDES (the Women's Association for the Development of Sacatepequéz)**, whose grassroots efforts include traditional Maya weaving workshops where survivors of gender violence receive support and learn about their rights as Maya women;
- **PIES**, currently leading sexual and reproductive health and rights programs with Maya K'iche' adolescents in-and-out of school settings which cover themes essential to preventing gender violence, as well as engaging predominantly male Indigenous authorities in workshops covering new masculinities and the elimination of gender violence, all under the MNCH project;
- **The Tonicapán National Hospital**, who helps spearhead an inter-institutional Gender Violence Response Network involving the National Forensics Institute, Public Prosecutor's Office, Human Rights Attorney's Office and the Tonicapán Police;
- Horizons partner **OSAR (the Network on Reproductive Health)**, who in addition to leading community programs with Maya youth to prevent gender violence, advocates for rights-based policies and laws to eradicate violence against women.

Each meeting provided a complementary perspective on the roots of gender violence in Guatemala, a country that consistently exhibits one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world. In Tonicapán, violent crimes against women exceed all other types of crimes in the province, even with low levels of reporting on these cases. While similarities were drawn to the Canadian experience—half of all women in Canada have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence since the age of 16—the Canadians also learned about the distinct challenges Maya women face and the impact gender violence has on maternal and child health.

Page 1 of 2

### **About Horizons of Friendship**

Horizons of Friendship is a Canadian International development organization with charitable status founded in 1973, based in Cobourg, Ontario and built on one abiding principle: helping people help themselves. Working directly with grassroots partners, we empower local people to address needs in their communities and make social and economic change happen in a big scale.



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Despite widespread barriers, such as the lack of financial and human resources required to address the multiple factors involved in gender-based violence prevention and response, the Canadians praised the resilience and work of each Guatemalan actor in the face of these difficult circumstances.

After reviewing Canada's history and current challenges in responding to gender violence locally and nationally with representatives of the Guatemalan organizations involved in the exchange, the Canadians applauded the commitment to work within and between institutions, civil society and community groups across sectors and jurisdictions as a key lesson from their Guatemalan counterparts to tackle gender violence.

"A law is a law," said CPS Acting Staff Sergeant, Brent Allison, "but its application is essential, and this is improved by having all people involved in the process sit down together, listen to each other, and collaborate—which is exactly what you're doing and what we can do more of."

"This was a true knowledge exchange", said Cornerstone Executive Director, Nancy Johnston. "Not only did we learn about the situation of Indigenous Maya women and the interplay between MNCH and gender-based violence, but I have also gained new ideas that will enhance the family violence prevention initiatives in our own community."

"Exchanges such as this one are crucial to bolstering cooperation and understanding between the North and South on an issue that cuts beyond borders", said Horizons Executive Director, Patricia Rebolledo. "Horizons has a long-standing commitment to eliminating violence against women in Central America and Mexico, and enabling opportunities for knowledge and experiences to be shared will help bring about a life free from violence for women and girls in the region—and at home."

The Canadian participants are available for media interviews, and the three Canadian organizations plan to hold a public event with special guests in November to talk in-depth about gender violence and maternal, newborn and child health in Guatemala.

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**To request more information, please contact:**

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Page 2 of 2



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