Hope Renewed: Reimagining a Safer World for Women

2021 Annual Report
OUR MISSION

The Women’s Justice Initiative (WJI) improves the lives of indigenous Guatemalan women and girls through education, access to legal services, and gender-based violence prevention.
Dear Friends,

We are immensely proud of the Women's Justice Initiative's accomplishments in 2021. This year we found ways to thrive despite the enduring challenges that the pandemic presents. We are so thankful for your continued support during this year of resilience, adaptation, and expansion.

In 2021, WJI expanded into 24 new communities in the municipalities of San Martín Jilotepeque and San José Poaquil through a partnership with the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women. As we expanded, WJI added twelve talented members to the team and continued to invest in our organizational capacity.

We reinforced our commitment to women and girls by providing our legal literacy program to 959 women, teaching 293 adolescent girls the importance of delaying marriage, and providing legal services to 576 women. We piloted a program for boys and strengthened our work with fathers to reduce violence and improve gender equality. Our 67 Community Advocates took on advanced leadership roles in their communities. Overall, our programs reached 13,100 individuals.

In 2021, we also joined an ambitious USAID-funded initiative to increase women's economic empowerment and reduce gender-based violence in Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras. Now, WJI is reaching women in diverse areas of Central America by sharing our rights-based methodology with local organizations and collaborating with new partners in the fight to end violence against women.

The past two years, while challenging, have strengthened our dedication to advancing equality and ending gender-based violence in indigenous communities. We look towards the future with renewed hope and excitement, ready to lead the way to create a safer world for rural women and girls.

Thank you,

Kate and Clara
The Context

Guatemala has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world. Rural, indigenous women are disproportionately impacted by violence due to social isolation, discrimination, weak public institutions, and limited access to resources.

Since the start of the pandemic, indigenous Guatemalan girls have faced an especially high risk of child marriage and early termination of their studies, as families attempt to respond to the economic repercussions of COVID-19.

- Less than 1% of legal cases involving violence against women and girls result in a judgment.
- 24% of Guatemalan girls between the ages of 13-17 have experienced sexual violence.
- 1 in 3 indigenous women who live with a man in Guatemala experience violence.
- 30% of indigenous girls marry before the age of 18.
WJI works in 72 Maya Kaqchikel-speaking rural communities across 5 municipalities in the Western Highlands of Guatemala.
WJI uses a holistic, community-based approach to improve access to justice and prevent gender-based violence and child marriage in rural Guatemala.

WJI’s Women’s Rights Education Program teaches women about their rights and helps build the self-esteem and the communication skills necessary to exercise those rights.

The Legal Services Program provides free legal support in cases related to violence against women and girls and economic rights.

To sustain change for the long-term, WJI trains local women to become Community Advocates, or rights educators and mentors in their communities.

Advocates also help lead WJI’s Adolescent Girls Program, which improves girls’ knowledge of their rights and encourages them to delay marriage.

100% of WJI’s services are offered in Kaqchikel, the local Maya language.
Regional Expansion

In 2021, WJI took a landmark step, joining an ambitious initiative to increase women's economic empowerment and reduce gender-based violence throughout Central America as part of the Women's Economic Empowerment Initiative funded by the United States Agency for International Development. WJI is providing technical assistance to community-based organizations in Honduras, Mexico, and three new regions of Guatemala.
2021 Impact Statistics

13,104 women, men, and girls benefited from WJI’s programs.

500 women and girls gained knowledge and skills to prevent child marriage.

959 women graduated from WJI’s legal literacy program.

576 women received free legal services from WJI.

26 women completed their two-year training to become Community Advocates.

247 police officers, service providers, and local leaders were trained in adequate responses to VAWG.
Magda’s Story

WJI Reunites Sisters, Supports Them as They Move Forward from Abuse

Magda, a 39-year old woman who fled to Patzún, Chimaltenango, from her community of origin, is steadily working to overcome the abuse that characterized her childhood and fractured her family. With WJI, Magda has found hope and the courage to fight to reunite with her family.

When Magda was fourteen years old, she was forced into an abusive marriage. After a decade, she was finally able to escape to Patzún, but in the process of fleeing, she had to leave her mother and sister behind with her abuser. Once in Patzún, Magda heard about WJI and reached out immediately. WJI provided Magda with legal support and psychological counseling, helping Magda seek protection from her husband and child support for her daughter.
Magda’s Story

“Where I’m from, there are no legal services available in my language. No one helped me until I came to Patzún and discovered the Women’s Justice Initiative.”

Magda also enrolled in WJI’s Women’s Rights Education Program. Connecting with WJI and other women brought Magda peace and inspired her to begin her search to find and reconnect with her younger sister.

With the encouragement of her fellow program participants, Magda sought the help of WJI’s legal team.
Magda’s Story

“My little sister and my mother had stayed with my abuser, but then I heard that my sister was not there anymore. I didn’t know if she was dead. I asked the Women’s Justice Initiative for help.”

WJI’s legal team researched and made calls until they found her sister. They invited Magda to accompany them to the community, finally reuniting the sisters.

Magda felt an immense relief when she saw her sister for the first time since fleeing her abuser. She saw that she was safe, that she was alive.
Magda’s Story

Magda ended the cycle of violence that began in her childhood and she encourages other women to do the same. She says, “I was so young when [my ex-husband] sexually assaulted me, when he did all those things to me. Young women should join groups like the Women's Justice Initiative, because they will help.”

After participating in WJI’s programs and building community with other women, Magda no longer feels alone or powerless in the face of violence.

She says, “We have the law behind us now.”
Irma, a Community Advocate from Tecpán, is one of many Advocates that have taken on increased leadership roles to prevent violence and child marriage.

In 2021, Irma and 17 other Advocates began implementing WJI’s Adolescent Girls Program in their communities. This new approach strengthens Advocates’ existing role as leaders in their communities, building powerful connections between generations.

Irma’s Story

A Legacy of Knowing our Rights: A Community Advocate Leads the Next Generation

Irma, a Community Advocate from Tecpán, is one of many Advocates that have taken on increased leadership roles to prevent violence and child marriage.

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Irma’s Story

By leading the Adolescent Girls Program, Advocates share their deep knowledge of women’s rights and leadership skills with girls in their community.

“My favorite part about being an Advocate is sharing with the girls what I have learned and transmitting the legacy of knowing their rights, knowing they have value, that we as women have the right to protect ourselves.”
Community Advocates use their experiences and knowledge to guide young women through topics such as sexual and reproductive rights, delaying marriage, financial literacy, and creating life plans.

“I got married quite young, at 19, and had my first child soon after. I did not know about the danger of having children at a young age, and my pregnancies and breastfeeding were difficult. I don’t want young girls to have the same experience. I only want them to have kids once they are physically, emotionally, and financially prepared.”
Irma’s Story

The Community Advocates become resources for young women. The Advocates and the girls describe a deep bond forming between them.

“One of my favorite topics to talk about with adolescent girls is puberty. There is a connection between teaching the topic and reducing adolescent pregnancy. Even though this is something that is often not taught in families, the girls are listening, ready to apply it to their lives.”
Community Advocates are changing the lives of young women in their communities. Thanks to the dedication of these Advocates, adolescent girls in WJI communities can see a future where they are empowered, making their own decisions, delaying marriage, and flourishing, living free from violence.

Irma’s Story

Community Advocates are changing the lives of young women in their communities. Thanks to the dedication of these Advocates, adolescent girls in WJI communities can see a future where they are empowered, making their own decisions, delaying marriage, and flourishing, living free from violence.
In 2021, WJI launched a regional expansion into 24 new communities, reaching over 5,700 women, men, and children.

Estela Calcá has worked with WJI for ten years and has played an instrumental role in the expansion process. Here, she discusses the process and importance of reaching new communities.
"Every time that WJI grows and expands into new municipalities, we are changing gender dynamics in entire families and communities. Combatting machismo and sexist attitudes is difficult, but little by little, step by step, we’re changing people’s perspectives.”

Staff Highlight: Estela Calcá
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“In our expansion efforts, I help lead our community mapping. Before launching our programs, we go to the communities and get to know the places and people. We conduct surveys to collect information to help inform our expanding programs, including the average age of marriage and number of children in families throughout the community.”
“It can be a challenge to work with community leaders. Most leaders are men, some of whom hold sexist attitudes. They do not understand why our programs focus on women's rights. They ask, ‘What about our rights as men?’ We have to explain to them that the men in our communities already have more access to education and public office and that we want women to have these same opportunities.”

“We have developed skills and strategies for approaching our conversations with them. In the end, we are usually successful and are able to collaborate with them.”

Staff Highlight: Estela Calcá
Staff Highlight: Estela Calcá

“Prior to attending WJI workshops, some women will ask things like, ‘Why is my son washing dishes?’ Even some women hold sexist attitudes, because that is what they have been taught. Yet, because of WJI’s work, we’re beginning to see more gender equity in homes.”
Staff Highlight: Estela Calcá

“WJI’s workshops open people’s eyes. They realize, ‘I can do so many things. I can achieve my dreams’...They also learn that they can make their own decisions. This leads to impact at the community level. Men realize that women can be leaders too, and women recognize that they can take on such roles.”

With leadership from women like Estela and WJI’s Community Advocates, we are creating a more equitable Guatemala.
Our Impact to Date

- **47,000** direct beneficiaries
- **141,000** indirect beneficiaries
- **1,455** community leaders, police, and government officials trained
- **3,446** legal cases related to economic rights or violence against women
- **86** women trained as leaders, mentors, and rights educators in their communities
- **3,512** graduates from the women’s rights education program
- **1,043** graduates from the Adolescent Girls Program
- **1,791** parents and community leaders have gained the skills through WJI workshops to prevent child marriage
Financials

Expenses - $622,522
- Programs: $478,326 (77%)
- Administration: $59,594 (10%)
- Development: $84,062 (13%)

Revenue - $777,044
- Foundations: $436,060 (56%)
- Individuals: $323,615 (42%)
- Corporations: $15,265 (2%)

2021 Ending Net Assets: $1,013,768
Thank You

The Women’s Justice Initiative would like to thank all of its Board members, partners, and donors for supporting our work. With your help, WJI is providing thousands of women and girls with the tools to transform their lives and strengthen their communities.