

SUCCESS

GSSG NEWS

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STATE DEPARTMENT, Washington DC
September 5, 2007

Three representatives of GSSG met today with three senior officials in the Visa Section of the State Department to petition for relief in the face of persistent visa denials by the U.S. Consulate in Guatemala. Although all of GSSG's youngsters had obtained visas without difficulty from the organization's inception in 2003, through 2004, 2005, and March of 2006, in June of 2006 all eleven applications were rejected and GSSG was given to understand that it would not be granted any more visas. GSSG's ability to continue its

work depended heavily on success today. The three GSSG representatives, Richard Conlow, McLane Layton, and John Bodoh, explained the nature of GSSG's program and pointed out that the denials had effectively shut down the organization and caused undue hardship to its aspiring youngsters. The State Department officials responded sympathetically, suggested a modest change in the structure of GSSG's program, and said they would contact the consulate in Guatemala.

The meeting had been arranged by McLane Layton, a Washington lobbyist, working for GSSG pro bono.

SUCCESS

November 13, 2007

Nataly Ical first came to the United States in 2004 to learn English. She was an exceptional student and, subsequently, Cardinal Gibbons High School in Raleigh, NC, granted her a four-year scholarship, waiving all tuition and fees. Tuition at Cardinal Gibbons is nearly \$8000 a year and fees add another \$1000.

Nataly was to return to the United States in August of 2006 for her freshman year at Cardinal Gibbons but was denied a visa by the U.S. Consulate in Guatemala. After some changes in financing, GSSG took her back to the consulate but she was again turned away. Apparently the admonition that we would get no more visas (see above) was holding.



Nataly

Last month, after the September meeting at the State Department, GSSG contacted officials at Cardinal Gibbons and, with the help of her potential host family, which has a daughter at Cardinal Gibbons, arranged for Nataly to matriculate in January.

Today GSSG took Nataly once again to the U.S. Consulate in Guatemala. This time she obtained a visa without difficulty.

U.S. Law allows students to enter the United State thirty days before school starts. As it has been almost three years since she was here to learn English, Nataly needs some time to brush up before school starts on January 4. She will arrive in North Carolina on December 5, just in time for Christmas.

Needless to say, Nataly is pretty excited. And so are we, not just because Nataly got a visa but also because she is the first one to apply since September 5 (see above). Her success is confirmation that we are back in business and that we can now plan for the future with some confidence.

In June we plan to bring the kids who were denied visas in 2006 plus another fourteen for families in Michigan whose eagerness to host was frustrated in 2007.

OUR NEW PROGRAM

In the past, GSSG's program consisted of three phases; it still does, but with a difference. Until now, in Phase 1 the youngsters came on a B-2 (visitor's) Visa to live for three to six months with American families to learn English by immersion. Then they returned to Guatemala until August, when they came back on an F-1 (student) Visa for Phase 2 high school.

The change that the officials at the State Department suggested on September 5 will have the youngsters come in June for Phase 1 on a J-1 Visa (sometimes called a "student-exchange" visa) to learn English by a combination of immersion and classes two or three times a week and, then, in the fall (still on the J-1 Visa) go directly into their freshman year of high school. When they return to Guatemala the following summer, they will get an F-1 Visa for Phase 2, their sophomore, junior, and senior years. We will not have to do any exchanges.

Phase 3, college, remains unchanged.

Although the difference in Phases 1 and 2 is slight in terms of learning, the situation is complicated by the fact that U.S. Law requires foreign students on an F-1 Visa attending a public high school to pay the full cost of instruction, which includes not only teachers' salaries but also the cost of amortizing the debt on the building, maintenance, custodial services, and the like.

In addition, U.S. Law stipulates that foreign students attending a public high school can only stay one year.

These two restrictions oblige GSSG to place its young clients in private high schools, where the restrictions do not apply, for Phase 2, their sophomore, junior, and senior years.

This change complicates things both for the students and GSSG—for the students because, if they were in a public school for Phase 1, they will now have to transfer to a private school and possibly a different city and a new host family, and for GSSG because we will have to find new schools and new host families for them.

FUNDING

GSSG now has its first student in college. As more and more of its youngsters graduate from high school and move on the college, GSSG's

expenses will increase significantly. For that reason, the board of directors formed a fund-raising committee to pursue corporate contributions to supplement its successful sponsorship program. (Sponsorship does not mean having a child in one's home; that is hosting. It means making a contribution to a particular child's account on a regular basis, usually monthly.)

One facet of corporate funding is clear—knowing someone on the board is the best way to get a grant. So if you are in that position, would you please contact the individual and mention GSSG. If you do not know such a person, please contact us and ask about the various ways in which you can help one child out of poverty. Our phone numbers are (919) 968-9052 and (919) 259-9059.

ALBA'S LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

[Editor's note. The following is an article by Alba's host mom.]

June 6, 2007

Today, I picked up Alba, the GSSG student who has lived with us for the past year. She came to us in March 2006 and stayed through several anticipated return dates. When she arrived that March evening, she seemed so small and bewildered. It could have been the travel and delays that were part of the day but I think that the journey she had just begun was so overwhelming that she was stunned. She met Dania and Brian, our children who still live at home, and we had some hot chocolate together. I showed Alba to her room and her bath-



room and Dr. Bodoh took the room across the hall. He stayed for a few days, helping Alba to ease into the family here.

When he left to return to North Carolina, Alba was "on her own" to begin acquiring English. She worked daily on her English assignments and also on her math. In addition, she took as her job the kitchen clean-up, which sparkled each time she finished. I knew a few words in Spanish so it made some explanations easier in the beginning but she was remarkable (we think, anyway) in picking up English quickly. We did see some homesickness and some days I had her talk to "the voice of experience," Dr. Bodoh, who has seen other students through the "blue" days. Subsequently Jorge Paque [GSSG's associate director, Guatemala] and Dr. Bodoh each took a trip to MN to see how she was progressing and helped with any situations that needed assistance.

In the year since she came to us, a shy and unsure-of-herself young woman, Alba has begun school and taken classes conducted in a new language. Her school, the excellent Hill-Murray High School in Maplewood, has a good reputation for college preparation and so, the course work is demanding. In the beginning, my husband or I helped with much of her homework, often just to clarify the meanings of words or phrases. Alba would sit at the kitchen table for about four hours a night every single day of the week. It was frustrating and tiring for her at times but we all admired what she demanded of herself. Sometimes I took an evening out, just for a break from ninth grade homework myself. Her report cards and occasional emails from her teachers show the results of her effort and their frank admiration.

In the past year, Alba has met Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, Scout and Jem Finch and Bob Ewell. She has read Steinbeck's *The Pearl* and Ann Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*. She has also been exposed to some of the less admirable programming that is American television but also to stories of

hope and better behavior among us—"Born Yesterday," "Dead Poets' Society," "Braveheart," and even "Take



The Lead." We tried to balance movies which show someone who was an underdog overcome obstacles, against the movies which Alba and my daughter chose for entertainment.

Alba has had to create and turn in art projects, work on and record data for science lab that I think should qualify her for entry-level scientific work, has passed beyond my math skills, learned many new vocabulary words a week, all year long, and coped with an educational

system very different from that in "Guatemala. She has heard about reproduction and sexual behaviors which are talked about more openly here than at home in Guatemala. She has developed into a person who will stand up for herself and has confidence enough to believe in what she can do. She has her driver's permit and next year will eventually drive herself to school fifteen miles away. She is a good swimmer. She knows how to saddle, bridle, and ride a horse. She can make a few basic meals but here, as in her home in Guatemala, mom usually prepares the main meals.

Alba came through a very demanding school year with A's and B's. She has become a daughter to us and a sister and a granddaughter to the family. I am jubilant that she will be returning to the love of her family in Guatemala next week. It has been delayed so too many times because of problems in the U. S. Embassy in Guatemala and, while it was a stagger-

ing blow to realize that going home for summer break or Christmas last year would have been too great a risk, she raised her head and kept going. I look forward to seeing the excitement and elation of her jumping back into the arms of the family where she grew up and whose anticipated monthly phone calls were little celebrations.

In a few days I will go with her when she returns to Guatemala for the summer. She will show me around her home town and have me meet people she knows there. We will spend time with her family. Her mother was brave to say "good-bye" for a year and deserves the joy of Alba's company again, though this is a different girl that is coming home. I am joyful for the two months ahead for Alba, she deserves them. But I look forward to the middle of August when we bring her here again for her sophomore year of school. Suddenly, summer looks longer than it has ever been.

WHAT IT TAKES

The figures below represent per-student costs in Phase 1. Costs in Phases 2 and 3 are higher.

- Recruitment & Analysis \$50** Our recruitment team (three people) travels to selected schools, conducts a group interview of twenty to thirty students at each school, administers a math test and an aptitude test, selects 4 or 5 out of each group for a home visit, interviews faculty, conducts a family interview and a one-on-one personal interview with the applicant in the selected homes, prepares a dossier for each applicant (family data form, birth certificate, transcript, photos, health records [if available], "Parental Authorization Form," and "Student Commitment Form"), meets at the end to discuss each applicant singly and ultimately rank all the applicants, secretly, discuss the results openly, identify the winners as those upon whom all agree, administers an IQ test to this select group and then votes again, and if necessary repeats the entire process until the requisite number of candidates has been met.
- Copyrighted Tests \$9** We give two tests that we must buy, the Wechsler IQ test during recruitment and the SLEP test (English proficiency) after three months in the U.S. We also give a math test and an aptitude test which are not copyrighted.
- Host Family Recruitment \$100** Includes preparation and mailing of packets [newsletters, "Conditions in Guatemala," "Hosting a Guatemalan Child in Phase 1," "Host Family Application Form," samples of host-family letters of intent, and affidavits of financial capability], communication with potential hosts, transportation to and from potential-host interviews, and photos.
- Passport & Related \$115** Includes passport photos (\$6), transportation to and from Guatemala City for the candidate and his/her parents (\$39), passport fee (\$30), two meals for the candidate and his/her parents (\$30), and a chest x-ray (\$10).
- Visa & Related \$306** Includes telephone call to made a visa appointment (\$7), application fee (\$100) [whether you get the visa or not], SEVIS fee [tracks students in the U.S.] (\$100), transportation to and from Guatemala City for the student and his/her parents (\$39), hotel [one night, one room] (\$15), and three meals for the candidate and his/her parents (\$45).
- Orientations \$28** Includes staff transportation to a half-day orientation for host families (\$5), three days of candidate orientations in Guatemala including duplicated materials (\$5), student transportation (\$3), and meals (\$15)
- Airfares & Related \$800** Round-trip includes the fare itself, departure tax, and one meal each way.
- Health Insurance \$600** For the twelve months of Phase 1.
- AIFS Tuition \$1500** In our first year we will have to partner with an existing student-exchange program.
- Clothing \$200**
- Books & Supplies \$100**
- Staff Support Services \$100** Staff prepares many documents and forms, travels extensively in both Guatemala and the U.S, secures missing records and documents (most parents are functionally illiterate and maintaining records and documents occurs haphazardly), secures passport and visa, and provides extensive logistical support.

If you would like to cover the expenses for one student, please call us at (919) 968-9052 or (919) 259-9059 or email us at GSSG-USA@nc.rr.com.