



In 2023 we experienced a significant increase in the number of scholarship students thanks in large part to additional support from our Canadian partner, Developing World Connections. This year we are teaming up again to expand the scholarship program even further.

Six of our scholars graduated this past year, one from university and five from high school. Thirty-nine students will be starting their academic year in February with help from Open Windows. Eleven of these are receiving their scholarships for the first time, while 28 are continuing from 2023. Fourteen will be attending middle school, 22 high school and three college. By the beginning of April, however, those numbers should increase.

At the end of our reinforcement sessions, many of the sixth graders we had hoped to support into middle school failed to pass the exams qualifying them for scholarships. Rather than give up the goal, we decided to initiate new reinforcement sessions during February and March. Open Windows teachers will provide intensive instruction in language, math and accounting to those still seeking support for their attendance at the secondary level. We expect at least 15 students will be attending those sessions and in the end we anticipate a significant increase in the number of scholarship students we are supporting this year.



*Después de un aumento en la cantidad de los becados en 2023, Ventanas Abiertas espera más becados en 2024. Para realizar eso les daremos clases de reforzamiento a estudiantes que no han calificado para becas al final del reforzamiento en diciembre. Mientras tanto tenemos 39 becados, 14 en básico, 22 en diversificado y tres en la universidad.*



## Baskets, Brunch, and Even a Parade

December was an extraordinarily busy time for Open Windows. It began with the distribution of over 900 Christmas baskets that our donors purchased for poor families in and around Dueñas. As in previous years, families were generally given two bags, one for themselves and one for a family they knew who were in even greater need. While hunger remains an issue in Guatemala at all times, we had not expected this great a response after the end of the pandemic. Our initial goal was just 600 bags, but you, our donors, knew better.



Early in December the Guatemalan board resumed its pre-pandemic practice of sponsoring a holiday celebration. However, instead of a New Year's Eve party, this year the board sponsored a brunch combined with entertainment by some of Open Windows' students and a silent auction. Many businesses in the area donated items for the auction, which raised funds for our educational efforts. Perhaps even more importantly, the event introduced Open Windows to more potential supporters from Guatemala. That fits with the recent addition of several Guatemalans to the board.

The third and most unusual activity was Open Windows' participation in a parade held on Christmas Eve. The municipality of San Miguel Dueñas sponsored the parade to provide an opportunity for community-wide celebration of the holidays and asked local organizations to participate. Open Windows' teachers created a float based on the theme "Once upon a time" and included children meeting with Santa Claus, played by one of our own. It was a lot of work, but also a lot of fun. And it generated publicity; some of those watching the parade said they had not known about Open Windows – even after more than twenty years on the main street in this small town!







*En diciembre la junta directiva y los maestros de Ventanas Abiertas estaban muy ocupados. Repartieron más que 900 canastas navideñas a familias pobres, dieron un desayuno con una subasta silenciosa y participaron en un desfile patrocinado por la municipalidad. Hubo mucho trabajo, pero mucha diversión también.*

Upcoming Events	
Dates	What's Happening
Feb. 5, 2024	Before- and after-school sessions resume
Feb. 19 – 23, 2024	Balmoral Hall School volunteers build a classroom
Feb. 27, 2024	Open Windows holds meeting for all parents
March 4 – 15, 2024	Open Windows volunteers build a house
March 4 – 8, 2024	Students take first round of assessments in language and math
March 25, 2024	Scholarship students attend workshop at Open Windows

2024 brings an important change to the programs at Open Windows. During the past couple of years we have hosted a typing school for secondary students. We did that to ensure that this required course was available to students in Dueñas, but when another local organization expressed a desire to sponsor the program, we gave them all the equipment and furniture, freeing up a classroom for our core activities. Both sides are happy.





## Cookie Business



This past fall, a group of girls and their teacher at Balmoral Hall School in Winnipeg (the same school that is sending, under the sponsorship of Developing World Connections, 11 girls to build a classroom in February) applied for a small grant to mentor girls at Open Windows in leadership skills. To make it more than just a series of discussions, the Balmoral proposal added an entrepreneurial component. Many Balmoral students come from families with their own businesses and have grown up absorbing the principles behind their parents' work. Few of the Open Windows girls can say the same. Most if not all of the Balmoral students come from families with comfortable social and economic situations, allowing them to feel self-confident from an early age. Few of the Open Windows girls can say the same.

The project was designed for the girls from Balmoral to meet repeatedly through Zoom with a group of girls from Open Windows, both primary school and scholarship students. Describing their own backgrounds and sharing their knowledge of basic business principles, the Balmoral students would help Open Windows' students start a cookie baking and selling business. Scholarship students from Open Windows would act as mentees in relation to the Balmoral students and as leaders in relation to the Open Windows primary school students.

They did not win the grant, but that seemed to make the girls at Balmoral even more determined to go ahead with the project. They are currently raising the money the grant would have given them and Open Windows will combine that money with some of its own funds to buy a stove appropriate for the project. Scholarship girls will work on the project one or two mornings a week; primary school students one or two afternoons a week. Assuming a profit is made, those participating from Open Windows will periodically share in the profits, but only after enough money has been put back into the business to make it sustainable.

We have never tried anything like this before and we are nearly as excited as the students to see how it works. We hope the result will be a consistent small income and a really big boost in self-confidence for some of our students. It should also be an extraordinary experience in international relations for the students at Balmoral.

*Este año unas estudiantes de Balmoral Hall School en Canadá serán mentoras de estudiantes de Ventanas Abiertas en liderazgo y habilidades empresariales. Las guatemaltecas iniciarán un negocio de galletas, ganando un poco de dinero y aprendiendo cómo funciona una empresa.*

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