



December 2021

Dear [First Name],

In the Western Highlands of Guatemala, our nearly 24,000 clients are redefining their Christmas holiday celebrations in various ways while navigating a new normal. I recently returned from my second trip to Guatemala this year, where despite the lingering dangers of COVID-19, it was remarkable to see all that our clients have accomplished and the high level of support they receive from Friendship Bridge's 200 employees on the ground in Guatemala. And with partners like you, our clients continue moving forward with determination and, as always, I am more motivated than ever after visiting them. We are wrapping up an incredibly successful year here at [Friendship Bridge](#) and I am pleased to share some of the highlights with you. Please find more details in the pages that follow.

98% OF STAFF VACCINATED >> At the time of writing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a Level 3 [Travel Health Notice](#) for Guatemala, indicating a high level of COVID-19 in the country. While just 26.2% of the total population has been vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus, 98% of Friendship Bridge's employees have been vaccinated, even in a country where health myths and misconceptions are rampant, and accessibility is extremely limited. Source: [Our World In Data](#)

INVESTED IN USAID'S GEDI INITIATIVE >> We are so proud to be part of the [ANDE \(Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs\)](#) team to create economic opportunities for women in rural Guatemala, supporting Vice President Kamala Harris' initiative to address the root causes of migration from Central America.

RANKED #2 BEST PLACES TO WORK™ FOR WOMEN >> We ranked second in the Best Places to Work™ for Women in Central America and the Caribbean in 2021, among 25 other multinational organizations that participated, including Dell Technologies and Cisco Systems Costa Rica. Meet Concepción on the next page to learn about her inspiring journey with Friendship Bridge.

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As 2021 draws to a close, all of us at Friendship Bridge are reminded of the many accomplishments we achieved this year with your help and we are dreaming big for the year to come, as we think about what we can do together in 2022. We hope that you have a happy and healthy holiday season and that you take pride in the amazing impact you are having on the lives of so many women, their families and their communities in Guatemala.

Happy Holidays,



Karen Larson,
President and CEO



98% of Staff Vaccinated

At the time of writing, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a Level 3 [Travel Health Notice](#) for Guatemala, indicating a high level of COVID-19 in the country. While just *26.2% of the total population has been vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus, 98% of Friendship Bridge's employees have been vaccinated, even in a country where health myths and misconceptions are rampant, and accessibility is extremely limited. *[Source: Our World In Data](#) This is especially significant in a country where health myths and misconceptions are commonplace and accessibility to health services is extremely limited.

In addition to ensuring the safety of our staff, we are also teaching our clients about the importance of getting the vaccine during their monthly Non-Formal Education sessions. We are handing out flyers that address commonly asked questions and we provide a specific phone number to allow each client to reach a staff member at Friendship Bridge who can address their questions. If clients are interested in being vaccinated, Friendship Bridge can help with the online registration and in some cases, getting vaccines to our clients.

- [Read our Blog: Why Manuela got the COVID-19 Vaccine Shot](#)



Invested in USAID's GEDI Initiative

Our work since 1998 has always been about supporting women to create a better life via employment and community sustainability. We are so proud to be part of the [ANDE \(Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs\)](#) team, which is also focused on the same mission to create economic opportunities for women in rural Guatemala, supporting [Vice President Kamala Harris' initiative](#) to address the root causes of irregular migration from Central America.

As part of [The U.S. Agency for International Development's \(USAID\) Guatemala Entrepreneurship and Development Innovation \(GEDI\)](#) initiative, companies and private sector partners have committed \$31 million to support entrepreneurs and businesses that can increase access to renewable energy and improve agriculture, water and sanitation, health, and education. USAID has provided an additional \$7.5 million in funding to ANDE to work with its dozens of member incubators, accelerators, and financial institutions in the region to provide direct support and capital to farmers, entrepreneurs, and business owners. Impact investment models like our [Bridge to Success](#) program will play a large role in this work, encouraging economic stability and job growth for the Guatemalan economy.



#2 Best Places to Work for Women

Great Place to Work® has [named Friendship Bridge](#) one of The Best Places to Work™ for Women in Central America and the Caribbean in 2021. The award recognizes organizations whose female employees report that their workplace creates trust and supports their ability to reach their full human potential, no matter who they are or what they do.

To determine these rankings, Great Place to Work® analyzed confidential survey feedback from its staff that took into consideration its female employees' daily experiences of innovation, the company's values, and the effectiveness of their leaders. The ranking is also based on how well-represented women are in the workforce and throughout

management, taking into account industry trends. To be considered, at a minimum, companies need to employ at least 50 women, at least 20% of their non-executive managers need to be female, and at least one of their executives needs to be female. Friendship Bridge employs 200 people in Guatemala, 96 of them women. Additionally, 48% of our staff identify as indigenous. Altogether, Friendship Bridge has received [the following rankings](#) this year:

- #2 The Best Places to Work™ for Women in Central America and the Caribbean in 2021
- #23 Best Workplaces™ in Guatemala 2021
- #30 Best Workplaces™ in Central America 2021

Staff Story: Meet Concepción

Friendship Bridge's in-country success rests on the talent and dedication of our employees, made up of exceptional individuals from a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences. In an effort to recruit and train the best candidates, we developed a formal Talent School a few years ago with the [MAIA Impact School](#) in Guatemala, formerly known as Starfish. MAIA, founded by Ted and Connie Ning (who also founded Friendship Bridge) is the first female, indigenous-led secondary school in Central America offering quality, holistic academic education to Guatemalan girls. Our Talent School partnership creates a direct pipeline for girls who graduate from MAIA and participate in our "readiness" program to ultimately enter the growing workforce at Friendship Bridge.



One person who exemplifies the success of this program is Concepción, Friendship Bridge's Education and Plus Services Assistant. Concepción is an indigenous woman of the [Maya Tzutuhil](#) ethnic group who grew up in Santiago Atitlán, the largest town on the shores of Lake Atitlán, a body of water in a massive volcanic crater in Guatemala's southwestern highlands. One of nine children, neither her father (a fisherman) nor her mother (a housewife) received any formal education. The highest level of schooling her siblings completed was the seventh grade.

While her sisters dedicated themselves to embroidery as artisans, Concepción was accepted to the MAIA Impact School and received a scholarship to attend. "I had the opportunity to break stereotypes about what it means to have a scholarship," she said. But the path was not easy. "Many people said that having a scholarship is eating and living from the organizations. These paradigms initially caused my father to refuse to participate in the

activities at MAIA. But over time, he changed his mind.” Concepción even got negative feedback from community members and some relatives about getting an education outside of her hometown. Still, she persisted. “I am glad that I didn’t listen to those comments,” she said. “I was fearless and moved forward.”

Concepción’s excellent academic performance at MAIA led her to college to seek a degree in Business Administration. During her second year of school, she applied for and was hired as an intern with the Human Resources department at Friendship Bridge. In this role, she received professional training and practical work experience, allowing her to become a full-time employee. She has now been an employee of Friendship Bridge for two years. What makes Concepción most proud about her work at Friendship Bridge is the impact she has had on empowering women in Guatemala. She also values the comradery amongst the team, the doors it has opened for her, and the community of high-impact women with whom she works. “Friendship Bridge gave me the opportunity to enter the work world and it gave me the space for a formal job as an indigenous woman,” she said. “The organization contributes and cares about my professional and academic improvement.”



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Building Bridges Gala: April 28, 2022

The Building Bridges Gala is Thursday, April 28, 2022. We’re planning an exciting hybrid event, with options for guests to attend virtually or in-person in Lakewood, Colorado at Baldoria on the Water.

BUY TICKETS → www.friendshipbridge.org/gala2022



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Handmade by Friendship Bridge supports the advanced artisan clients of Friendship Bridge with acquiring skills, education, learning experiences and technical assistance to reach their potential and new markets. It is also the name of our online store where we sell their handmade products. Find something you love!

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Plant the “Seeds of Empowerment”

Support women like Catarina with growing her hardware store business so that she can increase her income, provide for her family, and create jobs in her community in Guatemala. Thank you for supporting our work to create opportunities that empower women in Guatemala to build a better life.

DONATE NOW → www.friendshipbridge.org/donate