

Drug Culture Risks Education of Young Student

By Scott McAnally, - CAA Education Committee Project Leader

I am happy to report that six more of CAA's young scholarship students graduated from elementary school at the end of 2017 and were eligible to enroll into high school in 2017. In our last report, we highlighted the academic success of 4 young women who earned straight A's for the 2016 school year. But for every success story, we understand that there will be some disappointments and this report reflects that reality.

However, this report highlights the plight of one very bright December, 2016 elementary school graduate, a young man that I will call "Oscar". As the eldest of four children, Oscar is at a very difficult crossroad right now. Oscar and his siblings lost their father to a drug gang killing a few years back, and Oscar's mother served prison time for dealing drugs only to be released on a witness protection arrangement with relocation to San Ramon. Oscar has been in the CAA scholarship program for 2 years, and despite his excellent elementary school grades, it appears he will be leaving our scholarship program.

Under Costa Rican law, educational attendance is no longer required after completion of elementary school. So, between 6th and 7th grades, many young students are pushed to go to the fields to work to help the family. And, the specter of drug dealing in their barrios is a real barrier to education for many of



these students - especially for 12-13 year old young men who are quickly recruited by drug dealers knowing that these young "runners" are treated lightly if caught.

Oscar was awarded scholarship vouchers for first term 2017, but it is doubtful if he will be able to use them---he was not able to get into high school first term because Oscar's mother had failed/refused to sign his 2017 high school registration papers despite numerous attempts by CAA and other social agencies to get this done. Was the mother just being irresponsible, or is there some other reason this very capable student is being kept out of school? We recently learned that because of persistent association with and threats from drug dealers, Oscar's mother is trying to move the family to Nicaragua to find a home away from a particularly vengeful gang. Whether Oscar can get into a safe local high school is now an open question – and a concern for the scholarship team who are working with social and family support agencies trying to get Oscar help.

"Oscar" at First Term 2017 Scholarship Awards

Although CAA's supporters have helped Oscar get through elementary school; now, we can only stand in solidarity with him and hope that the system can help him find a path to continue his education. Even more importantly, we hope his family finds safety from the drug culture that imperils these children.

The futures of some of these children are filled with uncertainty; but your donations are really critical to provide hope for their educational success. And, despite some disappointments, we continue to support education for these children in poverty. Now, we must hand over the reins to a higher power to continue to support and watch over Oscar and his family. Buenas suerte, Oscar.

Four 2016 Academic Superstars in San Ramon, Costa Rica

By Scott McAnally – CAA Education Committee Project Leader

CAA Academic Excellence Award for 2016 (1 of 4)

In late January, 2017, CAA presented our scholarship students with their first term scholarship vouchers, and cheered them on for another successful year in class. Having graduated our first scholarship student from high school last December, we have re-focused on the remaining students ranging from 4th through 10th grades.

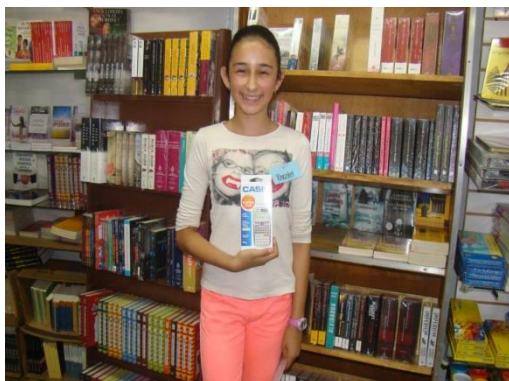


This year, we identified 4 students for academic excellence awards – all young women. These four young ladies, two are in the 6th grade, one in the 7th, grade, and one in the 8th grade, all achieved straight A report card scores for 2016! Although these young women are challenged by the lack of family financial resources, they are truly committed to preparing themselves for the opportunity for a better future through education. Given that many of our scholarship student's parents did not even finish 6th grade, achieving straight A report cards is even more significant!

Our CAA team hopes that these special academic recognitions will encourage some of the other students to try just a bit harder in 2017 to join this elite group. One young man in elementary school came up after the special awards and exclaimed that he too had good grades - he made two B's and the rest A's, and hoped that was sufficient to be able to join the four young ladies. We counseled him that perhaps he could focus a little extra attention to those 2 subjects this year, and indeed, he might be able to become the first young man to be recognized for straight A's in next year's awards!

We have counseling sessions scheduled in April with the parents, students, and their teachers to make sure that those that have struggled with subjects last year are regaining their focus on studies in 2017.

Our team also encouraged the high school students to make a commitment to volunteerism - to make time to help others this year. To encourage this volunteerism, we announced that next year, we will present a special Volunteer Recognition Award. It is important for these young students, who are being assisted by the generosity and concern of others, to recognize that they too can give back to others less fortunate or in need.



In this first school term, CAA presented scholarship vouchers totaling almost \$3,500. We are proud of all of our scholarship students and are working hard to give them the help they need to succeed. We want to recognize and thank all of our supportive donors and our CAA volunteers in Costa Rica for helping to achieve this success.

CAA Academic Excellence Award for 2016

(3 of the 4 shown)

It Takes a Village!

By Fernanda Rojas Ramirez, University Project Program Intern ;
Scott McAnally, CAA Project Leader

Nothing excited our 23 scholarship students more in early December than finishing the term and focusing on Christmas holidays with a 2 month break from school. For a number of these students, Christmas vacation included a daily ritual of helping the family pick coffee in the mountains all around San Ramon, not exactly a vacation. But, first we thought it important that students and their families reflect on the academic achievements and challenges of the past year, and to identify the necessary steps to exceed those academic levels in the coming year. To accomplish this, we organized a half-day counseling and workshop for December 10th aimed to keep these students focused on continued growth in 2017.

With the help of our 5 volunteer university social worker students, and under the direction of our licensed volunteer social worker, JF, we sat down with the mothers or fathers of the scholarship students to review last year's grades hoping to identify academic, attendance, conduct, or special need issues that we could help improve. While the parent interviews were being conducted, University of Costa Rica 3rd-4th year social worker students engaged the scholarship students in a workshop emphasizing the importance of Positive Values and Giving Back through Volunteerism.



Archive photo of 2016 Awards Presentation, Second Term

For some parents, this discussion was the first focused review and discussion of their child's academic record, and it allowed for a candid discussion with trained social workers about their child's progress. In some cases, the parent had not even reviewed the grades much less discussed them with the child! These interviews identified 3 students that will require closer monitoring and family intervention during the next school term - to change behaviors that are impacting academic progress. And, we identified 2 others with vision problems that need eyeglasses that we will provide.

In the case of one very athletic high school student whose grades had fallen during the second term of 2016, the interview identified that the student had been misinformed by other students that he would be able to get a university scholarship based solely on his athletic strengths, and it didn't really matter about his mediocre academic record. After a prolonged discussion with JF, a social worker and a former university admissions and financial assistance advisor, the student and his mother came to understand that without a strong academic record, even a good athlete could not hope to get into Costa Rica's

public universities, much less get critical government financial assistance. Hopefully, this discussion, and some first term scheduled follow-up counseling sessions in March and April, will enable this student to get refocused to give his academics equal attention as his athletics in 2017.

It really does take a village to successfully raise and educate a child - and without these dedicated social worker volunteers and your financial help, some of these students would slip through the cracks and drop out of school. We send our special thanks to all of you who continue to be members of our extended village!

CAA Scholarship Program's First High School Completion

By Scott McAnally, CAA Education Committee Project Leader

All 23 of the CAA Educational Scholarship students are working hard as they approach the last 8 weeks of the 2016 school year, but our spotlight today is on a quiet, determined 12th grade student who was raised in the coffee producing mountains west of San Ramon.



JCS, July 2016 Scholarship Awards

Josué (Joshua) finishes the 12 grade this December, and is preparing to take his Bachillerato Tests necessary to get his diploma. Gaining a high school diploma will be a first for the family, and Josué and his sister, also in high school, have been encouraged by their parents who are also taking courses after work to get their own high school diplomas. Both parents dropped out of school many years ago, as was customary then, in order to work the coffee fields and raise a family. In fact, in Josué's rural pueblo, only a handful of the parents of students now of high school age progressed beyond the 6th or 8th grade, and only two of those parents completed high school. So, for this family, earning a high school diploma is a very big deal!

Josué and his family have faced numerous challenges during his high school years --- the family lost their home and all its furnishings in a fire a few years ago, and it took a concerted family effort to recover from that loss. We were able to help Josué replace his laptop, but this fire was devastating and it really disrupted his school work.

And, like many students expected to already know some English as a second language before entering high school, Josué struggled because his rural elementary school did not have an English instructor. With the help of local English-speaking tutors including CAA volunteers, Josué has been able to progress to the final Bachillerato tests.

And, Josué's preparation was not just limited to studying in high school---he also works many weekends to support his education and family, and he participates in a young adult leadership group in San Ramon based on recommendations from high school officials.

We wish Josué success with his tests and achieving that diploma. Hopefully, it will open the door to university studies, or a promising technical career.

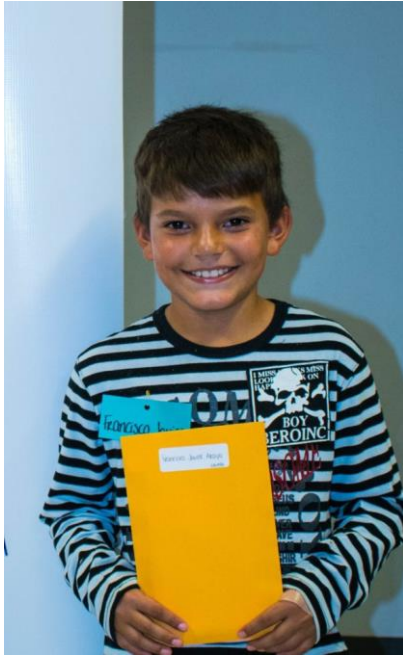
This also is a milestone to celebrate for the CAA Educational Scholarship program. Josué is the first of our CAA scholarship program student to be able to reach for that diploma.

Looking forward to 2019, three more CAA students will hopefully stand at the same point, sweating out their Bachillerato Tests; and, hopefully, marching forward to receive a high school diploma.

We share this success story with you, our generous supporters. Your gifts helped to prepare Josué to get this diploma, and with your continued support, more students will have the opportunity to achieve the same. By working together, we are making a difference, one student at a time .

Leadership and Volunteerism – Challenging CAA's Educational Scholarship Students in 2016

By Scott McAnally; CAA Educational Committee Project Leader, and
Fernanda Rojas - Scholarship Program Intern, University Scholarship Student



The Smile Says it All!

On July 16th, 2016, the CAA Education Committee presented Educational Scholarship vouchers to 23 worthy students to get these students ready for the second term of the school year. This term's recipients included 14 elementary students, 9 high school students, and 1 University of Costa Rica student serving as the scholarship program administrator Intern. This term's awards represent an investment of almost 1,750, 000 colones (about \$3,200 USD) to buy the shoes, uniforms, and school supplies that help keep these students in school.

The theme of this session was student leadership development, citizen responsibility, and giving back through volunteerism. Our program administrator Intern, FRR, lead a group activity to identify and focus on personal goals: Each of the students had the opportunity to introduce themselves, state their academic and personal development goals, and to identify their favorite activity. It is no secret in Costa Rica that soccer is the national sport, so it was no surprise that soccer was the favorite activity. However, one young woman reported that working with computers was her passion – this is a student that is willing to break away from the pack, and might be a future leader!



*University Program Intern,
Leading Challenge Session, 2016 Awards.*

And, to encourage leadership among our high school scholarship students, FRR also challenged these students to examine the importance of water in their daily lives, and identify opportunities for citizens to prepare for an increasingly drought-impacted Central America. This challenge was introduced in an earlier June session, and the student panel reported their findings at the Awards Presentation on the 16th.

- The student panel identified the important role of forests in protecting our natural water resource-production areas; proper waste disposal and recycling; and healthy eating choices that reduce the impact of cattle as a source of pollution, erosion, and as a driver of the conversion of forests into pastures.

- Additionally, the students identified the need for improved awareness of the impact of trash and waste management on communities and the quality of water resources; the need for more training on water conservation practices around the home and in agriculture; and the impact of agro-chemical use as a contaminant of surface and ground water/general health.

In summary, the panel recognized that Costa Rica's historical water abundance is changing with population growth and development, and citizens and the government must take action to more carefully manage water resources over the coming decades. And, introducing this topic to elementary students at

a young level was suggested as the way to build awareness and gradually change wasteful and destructive practices



CAA Awards, July 2016 Challenge Session; Student Report on Water Resource Issues

JF, CAA Education Committee Volunteer and licensed social worker, engaged the students on the importance of adopting a culture of volunteerism – to identify opportunities to grow and develop personal leadership skills through volunteer activities. If they do, these students will be better prepared to become productive citizens, stand out in the job market, and provide benefits to the community. The help that is being provided to these students through the CAA organization comes with expectations - those receiving help now should make the time to volunteer and help others in the future. In response to JF's comments, a number of parents voiced their support for encouraging youngsters (and their parents) to volunteer for the benefit of the community, and thanked CAA for the scholarship support.

Additionally, the Committee identified 9 students, mostly female, who are very interested in mathematics. To encourage these students to continue their interest in math and science, the Committee wants to offer an additional recognition for excellence in these subject areas at the 2017 or 2018 awards presentation. Science and math prepared students are in demand in the job market, and encouraging young women to pursue these non-traditional academic paths/careers could provide an economic bridge to help the family out of poverty.

You hold the keys! This CAA educational support program would not be possible without the generous contributions of our donors and CAA Committee members raising funds locally. Working together, we can continue to make a difference here in San Ramon, Costa Rica, one student at a time.

GIVING THANKS FOR EDUCATION - AN URGENT AND TIME-SENSITIVE OPPORTUNITY

By Scott McAnally – CAA Education Committee Project Leader

Meet Jorge, an eager and energetic 4th grade elementary student in 2015, one of the twenty-five fortunate San Ramon area students enrolled in the CAA Educational Scholarship Program. For Jorge, and similar students from immigrant coffee-working families in Costa Rica, the opportunity for regular schooling is elusive, given that coffee workers typically move frequently for work, and family money is not there for required school supplies and uniforms. However, for the past 3 years, Jorge, his sister and older brother have been able to regularly attend their rural elementary school, walking 4 kilometers to and from school each day for classes.

Unfortunately, the window of opportunity for education in Costa Rica is time and age sensitive. Jorge's older brother has not been as fortunate -- because of past irregular school attendance and lack of money, he had only achieved a 2nd- 3rd grade education level when he "aged-out" of elementary school at age 12. This young man is now walking 9 kilometers to a neighboring town for training to prepare him for work in agriculture. For this friendly and attentive 12 year old student, the opportunity to regularly attend elementary school arrived a bit too late.



However, thanks to your donations and other fund-raising efforts of CAA volunteers, Jorge has been able to get the school supplies, shoes and school uniforms necessary to regularly attend school, and he and his sister are now at the age-appropriate educational level. Without your help, Jorge and his sister are at risk of walking the same path the system offered his older brother – a path leading only to manual agricultural labor in the coffee fields.

CAA local volunteers, with your help, provided \$6600 in school supplies, shoes, uniforms and other financial assistance to 25 scholarship students for the 2015 school-year.

During this Thanksgiving season, can you please make a pledge to help students like Jorge? For these families in poverty in Costa Rica, the window of opportunity to get an education can close very quickly.

Kendall's Vision for the Future is Now Much Brighter

By Fernanda Rojas Ramirez - CAA Educational Scholarship Program Intern &
Scott McAnally, CAA Education Committee Project Leader



Kendall with new glasses, 2016

Meet Kendall, an active and intelligent elementary student in the coffee-rich mountains just west of San Ramon de Alajuela. He really enjoys playing football (soccer) at school, but he says that studies always come first! You might notice the tenderness and humility in his face and demeanor, and know that he is a student who really needs the help that is provided by the CAA Educational Scholarship Program, one of 24 assisted in 2016.

A few weeks ago, we received word through Kendall's parents that he was really having difficulty in this school term – Kendall's prescription glasses were 3 years old, and he needed new glasses now if he was to keep up in class. The family had no money for new glasses and was barely making ends meet. We quickly contacted an optician in San Ramon who is affiliated with the CAA, Lic. Alejandro Rodríguez Sánchez of *Optics Rosán*, who agreed to provide the CAA with a 50% discount for Kendall's examination and glasses. Within a few days, Kendall had his new glasses and was back in business.

Because of a very generous optician and quick action by the Education Committee, Kendall's vision is no longer an obstacle to learning. As Kendall's story demonstrates, It really does take a village to raise a child; in the US, Costa Rica, or anywhere in the world. Without generous donors, our CAA Education Committee volunteers in San Ramón, supportive parents and educators, this supportive "village" could not exist.

Now, our shared vision is for Kendall to stay focused on making good grades to prepare him for a brighter future!
