

THE YEAR OF “STAND FIRM TO DO GOOD & DO RIGHT! ADAPT AND CARRY ON!”

All in all, this was a year more difficult than usual, with the external context forcing continual risk assessment and adjustments to our work and activities. Having said that, when we reviewed our advances and accomplishments during 2024, it all seemed rather amazing! As a collective, we managed so do so much all things considered. The promoters, office staff and volunteers pulled together and figured out ways to make things happen.

Important programs continued if they were household-based and did not involve groups of children. These programs were: special needs; condolence visits; gardens and stoves; and the safe motherhood program (in a touching show of loyalty, pregnant women just continued to show up at the Atzin Centre to be seen by the midwife, Victoria). Other programs were put on hold, and our plans and security measures were adjusted frequently. Accompaniment of office staff was necessary in Cuernavaca; and more support by phone and in writing to the coordinators in Tlana was needed and provided. Susan returned to Canada for six months and worked remotely.

In 2025, **our priority focus now is strengthening our village partner, *Yotlakat Non Siwatl*, (YNS) as an organization and as a voice for its members and the community.** Its participants are all promoters, either as *socias* on the executive or *asociadas* as associate members.

The YNS members have identified clear learning needs toward greater self-sufficiency. This learning requires training and practice with sequenced transfers of more responsibilities: administration, planning and decision-making; basic accounting; recording and reporting; computer skills; basic physical and emotional assessment of individuals and first aid; and personal development including mental health and stress reduction. Writing of workplans to this end is in process.

THE BIG PICTURE OF CONTEXT: Multiple External Pressures on Village and Atzin

Three troublesome contextual situations occurred throughout the year:

IN TLAMACAZAPA. Rapid increase of military, police and cartel presence in Tlamacazapa, essentially starting in late 2023, with continued insecurity on the streets especially in the afternoons and evenings. After several months, shootouts and threats settled to control by one cartel, with armed members living in the village and occasional appearances of military vehicles. To date, the end result is cartel control of all transport provided by taxis and vans; planting of *halcones* (cooperating locals who report movements of people and vehicles) in all parts of village; cartel control of sale of *refrescos* (pop) and alcohol; and fearful normalization of cartel presence by villagers, with transfer of local authority to the cartel.

IN CUERNAVACA. Continued imprisonment of XRV in Atlacholoaya state prison in Morelos, with no indication of possibility of release. State process has been stalled because of a backlog of federal appeals. Clear threat to Atzin happened on 15 January with the murder of a youth outside Atzin House within sight of security cameras; and in addition, continued hacking of phone conversations (cell phones and landline). This forced the cessation of the XRV public campaign by Atzin in February, and an increase in security measures for office personnel.

IN MEXICO. There were national, state and municipal elections on 2 June 2024 followed by change of governments on 2 October. This brought most government services close to a standstill by March as people geared up for campaigns and then waited for the October change over. Violence as reported rose throughout the country, including in Cuernavaca.

CLOSER LOOK AT PROGRAMS AND EVENTS – Overview

EDUCATION

Tihueliske Early Stimulation: ran from 17 Jan to 10 April, 2024. Children attended for 3.5 hours, three days per week, with an average attendance ranging from 6-12. Attendance varied depending on weather and holidays; 2-3 children with complex needs (particularly language delay and/or hyperactivity) usually present. 3-4 educators present during the class; Lupe Aniceto was coordinator. Space did not allow for more children. Program was halted due to insecurity caused by presence of cartels in village (the public schools halted for 6-8 weeks in February-March). Tentative plan was to re-start in August but the high degree of risk continued, and the decision was pushed to 2025.

Tihueliske Children Education: discontinued classes on 26 January because of insecurity high risk and demands at one kindergarten for monthly protection money from parents by cartel; we had earlier decided to transfer 25 Tihueliske students to the Bilingual primary school in TLA.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Clara Cárdenas Alejandro – completed fifth semester in December 2024 at the Intercultural Health Program at Intercultural University, San Felipe, Mexico State.

Tonantzin Ariano Anacleto: visits NPH 14 Jan; 16-17 March; 12 May; 5-21 Aug vacation Atzin House; 3 sept video call; 21 Oct NPH mtg with SW; 9 Nov NPH 15th celebration. Will graduate junior high in July 2025.

Liset Guadalupe Porfirio Marcos – completed high school in TLA in July with weekly community service completed; has continued as a promoter.

Nahomi Uribe – completed 1st semester of kindergarten3 in Cuernavaca in December.

Bertha Fermin Procopio (diploma nurse; promoter) – worked in the office in CUE from April-November (7 months) for the first time in order to gain basic computer skills and to understand Atzin's administration procedures and logistics.

STRENGTHEN YOTLAKAT NON SIWATL (YNS) – YNS was legally formed in 2009 as a local civil association with nine women (called *socias*), with a purpose and constitution (*acta*) similar to that of Atzin but focused in Guerrero. This was in response to actions taken by men at the village *comisaria* (village mayor's office) to expel Atzin and our programs from the village. Our intention was to shift our roles so that Atzin primarily provided technical advice to YNS, and YNS members as local citizens/ promoters carried out the day-to-day programs. In that way, the work of Atzin-YNS would be protected, with greater potential for eventual self-sufficiency. Over the years, YNS legal papers were renewed on time and different women took on different executive positions with XRV consistently holding the position of president, but there was not the emergence of a more independent YNS until the pandemic and then the (deliberate) withdrawal in mid-2019 and then in late 2021 of XRV from continuing a key role on Saturdays in the village.

This year because of the increased risk of travel to the village, and Susan's six-month stay in Canada, we started a strong mentoring process using email and WhatsApp. The coordinators would draft a day plan for their work on a particular Saturday and follow-up during the week; I would add comments and items to the plan. They then would write up a *HECHOS* report (literally meaning "done" or "facts") on the plan itself, and update all registries and timelines. Susan would then comment on the *HECHOS*, provide critique, and review the registries. This was an intensive process carried out from early March to mid-December, contributing greatly to more effective actions. Certain weaknesses were frequently evident, for example, identification of an important item but then failing to carry it forward to the next plan, resulting in the item or person being lost to follow-up; or, difficulty in recognition of the implications of a specific event or finding (e.g., why is this important; what are possible consequences, good or bad?).

Participatory training of promoters & coordinators: conducted an intensive 4-day training workshop 13-16 Oct CUE (with Rodrigo Cruz doing media), focusing on: communication skills; mental health and stress reduction; critical analysis skills; Indigenous culture (Nahua) (Nacho Torres); start-up of an NGO (CEDEHC field trip, A. Ornelas).

HEALTH

Safe Motherhood/ Midwifery: ran each Saturday through out the year. Victoria Garcia attended patients with a promoter writing the patient record. Average number of prenatal women on record and attending: 25.

People with Special Needs: current count has 54 children and adults on the active list. Six deaths of registered adults during the year. Type of support and frequency of visits and follow-up varied depending on: health status/condition; receptivity of family; and especially the number of promoters available and their experience. As has been the case since the pandemic, this program needs more attention and promoter training, especially in terms of basic physical therapy, regular recording of notes and medications, and process for registration of new people. Medications for chronic conditions, especially for those with convulsions, are a major expense even if cost-shared with a family. Success story on 29 July 2024 with the long-awaited scoliosis surgery of Maria Fernanda Salazar at Shriners Hospital, Mexico City, with follow-up checkups on 22 Aug and 14 Nov; on discharge, she stayed at Ronald McDonald House for 3 weeks with her mother, followed by 3 weeks in Atzin House in Cuernavaca. Her case and care involved multiple partners collaborating over 4 years.

Condolence visits with death registry: by mid-December, two promoters had done visits to 47 families suffering a death in the family, and made notes for the death registry. Analysis of the registry is done by the director. Note that Atzin's registry is the only accurate count of deaths of villagers, with names and dates shared with village civil registrar (a former Atzin educator and scholarship recipient) at the end of the year. The large majority of families really appreciate this visit despite cuts in the items given to families during the visit. The death registry was started by Atzin in April 2020.

ENVIRONMENT, WATER, SANITATION

Sanitation: Background 2023: In response to a sanitation crisis with sewage overflowing in the streets of San Lucas in TLA, YNS did the following with assistance from Atzin: wrote a letter calling the attention of state and municipal authorities to the alarming health risk to the people of Tlamacazapa that was caused by a totally inadequate sewage system built during 2016-2020; organized a petition signed by 650 residents protesting the situation; and organized excellent photographs of the situation. The petition package was distributed to 11 officials in August, 2023. Promoters attended and participated in several meetings with authorities and in assemblies in Tlamacazapa. The response from authorities was that

they would analyze the situation and propose remedial measures, but that there was no remedial budget until after elections in June 2024.

2024: Sewage situation worsened. Following a flurry of visits and assessments taken by different municipal and state departments, there have been no definitive remedial actions. (The obvious immediate action to take is to disconnect the households in Santiago that are connected to the pipes, but no one apparently dares to do this.) Following intimidating visits and requests to recruit votes in the upcoming elections by municipal personnel (not always clear who was who, from where) largely directed at one coordinator who had spoken up at several assemblies and had been identified as a leader. Following a verbal death threat (with witnesses) from one village woman who had been closely involved in the construction of the sewage infrastructure, promoters nervously put this problem on a back burner in the summer of 2024, leaving it until after the new state and municipal governments take office in October, and it may be possible to take on a different strategy in 2025, with outside alliances.

Gardens & Stoves: continuation of monitoring of 14 household kitchen gardens by promoters, with about 8 doing really well (and with 4 original gardens discontinued for different reasons), using a simplified reporting form which helps to organize their visits. Rotation of visits improved. Dates of visits and findings/ problems were then recorded on a master excel file. Square foot gardening brochure in Spanish produced and distributed to promoters and families in April 2024. 6 gardens were doubled in size in the fall of 2024. Approval of small grant proposal for US\$5000 received from MERC in late October for continuation of garden project (focused on: gardens for 5-6 new families and 2 gardens for 2 classes in a primary school, with education on care, 1 rotoplas tank). This is in planning stages with YNS; delayed because of move of Atzin House to the new location.

The first step in ecological concrete stove project in Tlama was multiple trials of stoves being constructed with slightly different sand or proportions in the rented workshop. A total of 36 additional stoves were then made by the crew, of which roughly half had hairline or bigger fractures when removed from the molds. The crew had somehow changed the procedure, materials or proportions but it was difficult to figure out just what happened. Ruben slowly repaired five stoves using two techniques, and Laura cooked each Saturday on a repaired stove to test it – so far, the repairs have held.

Final report on stove educational resources submitted to People to People (Brandon, Manitoba) leaving one instructional manual on stove construction partially done and pending. People to People has retired as an organization after a long history of small grants to Atzin. An interim short report on stove production was given to Rotary Club Stampede Park Calgary.

Timeline of events in TLA: starting in December 2023, the 3 program coordinators and promoters have tracked most, if not all, major events occurring in Tlamacazapa, with particular attention to the actions of the cartels on the streets. Although many details remain unknown, this timeline contributed to our analysis of the degree of risk, and subsequent adjustments to programming and travel. The timeline informed our understanding of the means for rapid control of the psyche of a vulnerable population by organized crime.

XRV CASE

Summary: On May 3, 2023, an Indigenous Zapotec woman, Xóchitl Ramírez Velasco (45 years of age, dob 21 Sept 1979), human rights defender and community organizer, was detained on the street in Cuernavaca, Morelos, and charged with aggravated kidnapping. She has since been held in the Atlacholoaya state prison in Morelos, despite the fact that substantial evidence of her innocence was presented in November 2023 during a dismissal hearing of the kidnapping charge.

As of January 2025, her case is currently waiting decisions on two appeals by the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, prior to continuation of the legal process in Morelos. Two lawyers (Lic. Ximena Ugarte Transgay and Lic. Veronica Garzon) from the Mexican Institute of Human Rights and Democracy (IMDHD), based in Mexico City, continue to represent her.

Suffering from epilepsy since childhood, Xochitl has had more than 70 grand mal convulsions since her imprisonment, a condition of uncontrolled seizures of very high risk to her health and life. She has had inadequate medical attention; irregular administration of her medications; and is being held in overcrowded prison conditions of extreme stress.

Threat on 14 January: murder by assassins of a 24-year-old male on sidewalk outside Atzin House CUE within range of our security cameras and lights. This was a serious warning to Atzin, causing us to decide to withdraw from our public campaign on all social media and posters in CUE.

Atzin attendance at hearings: judges at all hearings ruled against the defense in XRV’s case.

#1 on 9 January (MM, GAC); #2 on 6 Feb (MM); #3 on 29 Feb (MM); #4 on 22 March (MM); #5 on 12 Abril (MM); Appeal hearing on 9 August (MM, BFP). There were 3 additional Zoom hearings attended by judge & lawyers only).

The legal process at state level was stalled because of the work stoppage by federal judges for three months in August-October, and there is now a longer backlog of hearings for appeals. Despite petitions from defense for neurological assessment, no progress on getting an appointment at the Parres Hospital in CUE (the only hospital permitted to do these by judicial system).

Prison visit on 9 Nov by three Atzin personnel; special permission granted to XRV as one of about 10 organizers of Day of Dead show for prison population and visitors.

Publication Review of document by Cultural Survival prepared for UN committee, entitled: *Observations on the State of Indigenous Rights in Mexico, 112th Session of the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* (8-26 April 2024).

ADDITIONAL & SPECIAL EVENTS (by date)

Month	Event
Feb-March	Translation to Spanish of 30-min video on Atzin website, <i>Returning to Strength</i> by volunteers Gail and Martha; subtitles inserted by Rodrigo Cruz.
Feb 3 & 17	Two 4-hour classes on mental health and brain function at CEDEHC in Cuernavaca (Susan with Ana Laura and Ruben). Well attended approx. 40 people, with good participation.
Feb 5	Atzin Mexico Board meeting, Cuernavaca
March-April	Donation of a scanner and completed scanning of all Atzin receipts 2021-2022-2023 by two volunteers, Gail and Martha
9 March;19 March; 6 April; 20 April; 23 May; 12 Sept; 19 Oct	Meetings usually 2-hours in length: members of Yotlakat Non Siwatl (YNS) and personnel Atzin. In TLA.
April	Review comments and paragraph on case of XRV for document submitted to UN Committee for Elimination of Racial Discrimination by Cultural Survival, entitled, <i>Observaciones sobre el Estado de los Derechos Indígenas en México Preparado para: La Sesión 112 del Comité para la Eliminación de la Discriminación Racial (8-26 de abril de 2024)</i> (Susan)

24 May – July	GoFundMe campaign done by volunteer Mimi Dupuis and friends, raised total of C\$3000 for back surgery of Maria Fernanda, 11 years old, and Special Needs Program.
3 – 29 June	Annual Review of Atzin Canada financials in 2023 by Kenway Mack Slusarchuk & Stewart (KMSS), Chartered Professional Accountants (Calgary, AB), as required by Corporations Canada for the first time. Final report with approval submitted 29 June. Time consuming search by Rayanne and Susan for a firm that would take on this task at a reasonable cost.
July 2024	Publication of book <i>Contar el Abandono</i> with chapter 7 written by Mariana Norandi, entitled: <i>Tlamacazapa: crónica de un paisaje envenenado (Chronical of a poisoned landscape)</i> . Published by Bellaterra, Spain. Mariana wrote this chapter on village conditions following a series of extensive zoom interviews with promoters, XRV and Susan in 2023. She also read many internal Atzin documents.
August 2024	Completion of participatory training manual by Susan, entitled, <i>Tihueliske Podemos! Capacitacion participative en desarrollo comunitario Un manual para trabajadoras comunitarias</i> . 50+ training exercises for community level promoters. Now looking at best ways for distribution. Final report submitted to Rotary.
7-8 September	Atzin Canada Board meeting, Calgary and zoom.
6 October	Atzin Mexico Board meeting, Cuernavaca
20 October & 16 November (dates approximate)	Theft of all water in the rainwater catchment cistern at the Atzin Centre, TLA. Thief first time forcefully lifted cover to insert hose and pump out water. Second time, broke the padlock to gain access. Probably a neighbour. Repairs done; our 3 Rotoplas still full.
13 November	Move from Atzin House on Nogales, col Lomas de San Antón (the owner requested his house and gave us an extension of time) to a new location on the outskirts of Cuernavaca. Extensive search for new location for Atzin House and an exhausting actual move, with work of sorting, discarding, donating and packing – we were reviewing so many years of operations!