



Self-Reliance Is Ultimate Goal of Guatemala Aid Organization

Leslie Baer Dinkel Publishes Autobiography on Founding Local Hope Guatemala



Mel Dinkel (left) and Leslie Baer Dinkel enjoy spending time with village children at Local Hope's headquarters in San Martín Chiquito, Guatemala. | Credit: Courtesy Local Hope

By **Tyler Hayden**

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Since leaving the safety of her suburban home 28 years ago and founding an international aid organization in Guatemala, Leslie Baer Dinkel has been extorted, kidnapped (twice), and survived a brutal civil war. Dinkel's story, and the story of Local Hope Guatemala — which now delivers clean water, emergency relief, and health and education programs to nearly 5,000 Maya people living in poverty — are told in her new autobiography, *Hope Dancing*. Published just four weeks ago, it's already the number-one new release in its category on Amazon Kindle, and this Friday, October 25, from 4 to 6 p.m., Dinkel will be signing hard copies at the [Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History](#).

Without any political commentary, Dinkel brings the reader alongside her as she discovers the hunger, poverty, and other indignities suffered by the Mám-speaking Maya people, whom she comes to know as friends, including children she watches grow up over three decades. Local Hope runs two preschools and serves 25,000 hot meals a year. It's graduated 600 children from high school (the first Maya children from the area ever to graduate) and has seen 27 through college.

"Local Hope has been very successful at preparing people from this region to have meaningful work and health at home so they don't have to risk their lives trying to migrate," said Dinkel. "Self-reliance is our ultimate goal."

While Dinkel doesn't live in Santa Barbara, Local Hope's local connections run deep. Three of its boardmembers — Sherry Robin, Kathy Burt, and Steve Kent — live here, S.B.-based Direct Relief was its very first partner, and nearly 100 volunteers come from the area. All proceeds from the book go back into the organization, and each sale funds medicines for 10 children. Another book release event will be held on Catalina Island on November 13.

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