

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SPONSORSHIP

ABOUT SAFE PASSAGE

How are children accepted as students at Safe Passage?

Typically, we begin receiving applications in December for the following school year (Jan – Oct). Since we often receive more new student applications than we can accept, we strive to select students who have the greatest need. During the selection process, our social work team makes home visits and interviews each child and his/her family. Factors taken into consideration include economic need, the child's desire to study, prior school performance and history, and the family's interest. Unless they stop attending or are asked to leave school, a child is always guaranteed a space in our program in subsequent years.

What services do participating children and families receive?

Safe Passage operates from January to December, with a break in term from the second week in December until the third week in January. We currently serve more than 550 children from over 300 families, providing students with their school uniform, shoes, books, and school supplies at the start of each school year. These items are required by the Guatemalan public schools.

School-age children attend their own school for half of the day. They spend the other half of the day at Safe Passage's Educational Reinforcement Center, where we provide them with academic coaching, a daily snack, a healthy lunch, medical attention, family support, and counseling. To supplement their school experience, we also offer enrichment activities that may include sports, English, art, or computer classes. Children under age 6 are cared for all day by educators at our Early Childhood Learning Center.

Parents of children enrolled at Safe Passage can enroll in our Adult Literacy Program, where they can learn to read, write, and study for their own degrees. Parents can also take part in workshops on family health, entrepreneurship, and more.

In specific instances, the children and their families can earn monthly food assistance. This initiative rewards children in particularly difficult circumstances for regular school attendance and academic progress while giving other family members a vested interest in the child's education. We strive to promote social development and self-sufficiency, while also acknowledging the immediate limitations faced by individual families.

At what age do children leave Safe Passage?

Safe Passage serves children through *diversificado*, or the high school level. We are committed to linking them with resources and facilitating connections that will help them pursue next steps.

To what level can parents study through Adult Literacy?

At present, parents study on-site with a Safe Passage instructor until they receive their 6th grade diploma. We also offer distance learning support for students continuing on through *basicos* (middle school) and facilitate connections to other institutions for *diversificado* (high school).

THE SPONSORSHIP TEAM

Who is on the Sponsorship Team and where are they located?

Our Sponsorship Team consists of bilingual professionals located in Guatemala, where they communicate directly with our educational and social development team on the progress of each student. They are responsible for matching sponsors with students, facilitating program-wide and individual communications, providing special acknowledgements for our students on birthdays, holidays, and graduation, and responding to sponsor inquiries. Current team members are Irene Jurado, Wendy Maldonado, Mario Galvez, and Sabrina Perez, led by Cindy Mendez Ruíz. Our U.S.-based contact for Sponsorship is Michelle Smith, Associate Director of Development. All pledge payments from U.S. and other non-Guatemalan sponsors are handled by Michelle and our Comptroller, Barbara Davis.

How can I contact the Sponsorship Team?

For questions about starting a new sponsorship, your sponsored student, visiting Guatemala, or special occasions, contact our Guatemala-based staff at sponsorship@safepassage.org. Questions about your pledge, tax receipts, our policies, or Safe Passage programs should be directed to Michelle Smith at michelle@safepassage.org.

By mail: Safe Passage Proyecto Camino Seguro
Attn: Sponsorship Atención: Padrinos
81 Bridge St., Suite 104 Calle del Hermano Pedro #4
Yarmouth, ME 04096 Antigua, Guatemala
Phone: (207) 846 -1188 (502) 7832 – 8428

ABOUT SPONSORSHIP

Please note that while many of these questions refer to child sponsorship, they also apply to mother sponsorship.

What does it mean to sponsor a child?

By sponsoring a child through our program, you do more than support a child financially: you are developing a personal connection with our program and a particular child. Your child will respond to your encouragement, guidance, and support. The consistent faith in the educational process that you demonstrate has an enormous impact as your child pursues his or her own education in a challenging environment.

Can a child have more than one sponsor?

Yes. We offer sponsorships where you and up to three other people share in the cost – and positive outcomes – of a child’s participation in our programs (\$600 pp annually). If you are interested in supporting a child’s full needs, we also offer Sole Sponsorship (\$2,400 annually). No matter which you choose, the sponsor relationship is still very personal for both the child and the sponsor.

I visited Safe Passage in Guatemala on a team / volunteer term / tour and would like to sponsor one of the students that I met. Can I request a specific child or mother?

Yes. We do our best to honor requests from visitors who have already begun a personal relationship with a child or adult learner. If the student is already fully sponsored, we will suggest the names of some other students in need, often from the same class or family.

Can my group sponsor a student through Safe Passage?

In our experience, one-to-one sponsorship relationships offer children in the program the greatest stability, most consistent encouragement, and deepest personal connection. We find over and over that these elements are the most critical to helping our students to overcome the many challenges they encounter in their pursuit of a formal education. We love for groups to stay involved in Safe Passage, and if group members are not in a position to sponsor as individuals, we are delighted to work with you to find another way to continue to connect with and support the program and the children we serve.

In the past, we have on rare occasions accepted applications for groups demonstrating a high level of commitment and sustainability. To review the guidelines for our existing sponsor groups, [click here](#).

I’m ready to get started. What do I need to do to enroll?

First, congratulations on making the decision to support a student through Safe Passage! We’re so glad to have you on board. To begin your sponsorship, we ask you to complete and submit an application online or by mail. You will be asked to decide how – and how frequently – you would like to make your pledge payments. The table below summarizes your payment options:

Payment Method (choose one)	Payment Schedule (choose one)
- Auto-pay by credit or debit card (enroll online / by phone)	- Monthly - Quarterly

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Auto-pay from a bank account (contact us for ACH form) - One-time online credit card payments (using our Donate Now button)* - Personal or cashier's check, submitted by mail* - Deposit to Friends Group account in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, or the United Kingdom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annually
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Once the Sponsorship Team has received your application AND first payment, they will begin the matching process. Expect it to take approximately 10 days from the receipt of payment to when you are provided with the name of a child or adult student in our program.

* Please write "sponsorship" in the memo line.

When will I hear from my sponsor child?

Approximately two weeks after you are matched with a student, the Sponsorship Team will email you a recent photo and biography. The delay may be slightly longer if the students are on break or a child is out sick when the team makes their weekly visit. We encourage you to write to the student after receiving the bio to introduce yourself and your family (pictures help!) We help our students to write to their sponsors 3 times each year in a project-wide communication, and individually whenever they receive a letter or gift.

Do my contributions go directly and exclusively to my sponsor child?

We do not have the administrative support to manage more than 500 different accounts, so we have adopted the "soup pot" concept, an approach used by numerous other non-profits. All contributions from sponsors go into a centralized account, which we use to meet the needs of each student. This approach also ensures that we can care for every child regardless of changes in an individual sponsor's financial situation.

How does Safe Passage use my contributions?

Your sponsorship contributions help us to provide our students with:

- A safe, healthy, and clean learning environment
- Educational reinforcement from our Guatemalan teachers
- A healthy lunch and nutritious snack
- School supplies, books, uniforms, and shoes
- Enrichment activities in art, writing, computers, sports, and English, plus weekend clubs
- Support and counseling, as needed, from our social workers and psychologists

How long is my sponsorship commitment?

The minimum commitment for a sponsor is one year, although it is our hope that the connection between you and your sponsor child will continue for as long as the child remains in school and at Safe Passage.

What happens if my sponsored student leaves Safe Passage?

In working with at-risk children, departure prior to graduation is a very real possibility. Children deal with daily pressures that include lack of parental support, family financial needs, drugs, alcohol, abuse, gangs, and violence. While they are at Safe Passage, we do our best to give them the skills to make healthy decisions for their future and view every day of participation as a success. If your child graduates or leaves the program, we will notify you and work together to find a new sponsor child.

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN SPONSORS AND STUDENTS

Please note that for security and confidentiality, all communication between sponsors and students is handled by our Sponsorship Team.

How often should I write to my sponsor child?

We suggest that you correspond with your child at least three times per year, as we have found this helps to develop a meaningful connection. Some sponsors choose to write every month!

What should I write about?

Your child's profile will tell you your child's age, grade, and current interests; we encourage you to refer to it to help start the conversation. For example, what have they learned in soccer this spring? What is their favorite class this year? How are their brothers and sisters? Also, they are interested in learning about you! Consider sharing a photo of you with your own family. Where do you live? What is your occupation? Do you have children? Pets?

Does my sponsor child actually receive my letter?

Absolutely! Our Sponsorship Team delivers letters to students every week and helps them to respond to your note.

How often will I hear from my sponsor child?

It depends. Several times during the year, the Sponsorship Team coordinates a program-wide communication to sponsors. However, your child will always be given the opportunity to respond to your letters and you may hear from him or her more often.

I don't speak much Spanish... Can I still write to my sponsor child?

Yes! Our Sponsorship Team can provide English / Spanish translation for non-Spanish speakers. If you are writing in English, we only ask that you keep your letters to a reasonable length to facilitate timely delivery to your child.

Where should I send my letter?

You may mail letters and cards in envelopes smaller than 9 x 12 x 2" to:

Proyecto Camino Seguro
Atención: Child's Full Name
Calle del Hermano Pedro #4
Antigua Guatemala

When including a small item from the accepted items list below, please be sure that your envelope is no more than 2" thick. Expect it to take up to 3 weeks for your letter to reach our office, and another two weeks to be translated and delivered.

Can I email my sponsor child?

Yes, sponsors can also send quick "hellos," brief messages, or a single photo to our email account at sponsorship@safepassage.org.

I know that my sponsor child is in need of many items. Can I send gifts to him and his family?

We ask you to refrain from sending any items larger than what will fit in a 9"x12" envelope, of no more than 2" thick. We want our children to understand that the most important things sponsors provide are support and encouragement for their educational and emotional development. Also we ask that for your sponsor child's safety, you **do not** send cash or electronic items.

Sometimes sponsors are tempted to send as many gifts as possible, but please be assured that your child will be touched by however you choose to show your support. Indeed, your encouragement is a constant in a life that is filled with unpredictability, and that is truly the most valuable gift you can provide.

The list below includes items that are greatly appreciated and appropriate to send. Out of respect for the above points and to minimize hurt feelings among our other students, we suggest that you limit your selections to one or two items per mailing.

Acceptable Items (1-2 per mailing)
Photos of you and your family School supplies, including pencils, pens, crayons, and construction paper

Educational games (flash cards, fun workbooks, etc.) - preferably in Spanish
Soft-cover books in Spanish (Books are extremely expensive in Guatemala)
English-Spanish dictionary
Inexpensive clothing (socks, underwear, t-shirt, or sweatshirt)
Trial size hygiene products (shampoo, hair gel, etc. – especially popular with students 10 & older)
Stickers
Small craft / activity kits (paper dolls, balsa-wood airplanes, puzzles)

What can I do to help celebrate my sponsor child's birthday? Christmas?

At Safe Passage, we commemorate the birthday of each child with a modest gift (a pair of sneakers, a jacket, a new backpack, etc.) that the child needs and wants - and will help him to focus on more important things, like learning! Birthdays are always special at Safe Passage and we encourage you to let your child know you are thinking of him with a card of your own. For those who are interested, you are welcome to donate an additional \$20 - \$30 to our Gift Fund to offset the purchase of birthday and holiday gifts. You will receive a reminder via email one month before your sponsor child's birthday so you have time to send a card from wherever you are. Children also receive a small gift at our holiday celebration in early December. We recommend that sponsors mail their holiday cards by November 1st to allow adequate time for delivery and translation during this busy season.

I live in Maine. Can I drop my letter off at the U.S. Office to send to Guatemala?

Yes. Staff and volunteers traveling from Maine to Guatemala are often willing to carry correspondence on behalf of our sponsors. However, please note that such travel is sporadic and we cannot guarantee a specific delivery timeline.

I sent a letter nearly a month ago. Why haven't I heard back from my child yet?

Be patient! We work diligently to translate your letters and help children to write back to their sponsors in a timely manner. Allow 3 weeks for delivery to our office in Antigua, 2 weeks for translation and delivery to your child, and several weeks more for the child's response to reach your door. The mail system can sometimes be unpredictable, especially around elections or the holidays. Keep in mind that our turnaround times may also be longer during busy visitor (June – August) and holiday seasons (Dec – Jan), when we are processing a higher volume of applications or correspondence from our 800+ sponsors. If you have concerns about whether a letter was received, please contact us at sponsorship@safepassage.org.

PAYMENT, TAX CREDITS, ETC.

What are the current rates for sponsorships?

- Shared child or mother sponsorship \$50 USD / month or \$600 USD / year
- Sole child or mother sponsorship \$200 USD / month or \$2,400 USD / year

When are my pledge payments due?

All sponsorship payments are due on the first of the month for monthly, quarterly, or annual payment schedules. Note that for individuals enrolled in Autopay via credit card or bank account, payments will be deducted on the 15th of each month (or the closest business day).

Will I receive a bill to remind me when my pledge payments are due?

No. To conserve resources, we rely on our sponsors to remember to submit their pledge payments on a regular basis. Should you miss a payment, you will receive reminders from us at 30 and 60 days past due. Any sponsorships that go unpaid for 90 days will be cancelled.

I would hate to accidentally miss a payment! Can I enroll in Autopay?

Yes! Autopay is a great resource for both you and us. To enroll for automatic payments by credit or debit card, please call our U.S. Office to register an account and provide authorization (207-846-1188). You may also opt to make automatic payments by debit from a bank account. Please email michelle@safepassage.org for an ACH form, to complete, sign, and return by mail to our U.S. Office. Payments will be deducted on the 15th of each month (or the closest business day).

I would rather not enroll in Autopay, but like the convenience of online transactions. Can I pay via the website?

Yes. Just click on the “Donate Now” button on our main page and fill in your information. Please write “sponsorship” in the comments box so the payment is appropriately allocated to your pledge.

I prefer to mail a check for my pledge payments. Who should I make it out to and where do I send it?

Sponsors in the U.S. and Canada can write checks payable to Safe Passage and mail them to our U.S. office at:

Safe Passage
81 Bridge Street, Suite 104
Yarmouth, ME 04096

Please write “sponsorship” in the memo line.

I live in Guatemala. Can I pay directly to the local office?

Yes, payments can be dropped off at our Antigua office or with Reception at our Guatemala City Educational Reinforcement Center. The Antigua office address is Calle del Hermano Pedro #4, open from 9 am to 5 pm. Our Guatemala City address is 6a. Avenida 11-95 Zona 7, Colonia Landivar, open from 8 am to 5 pm.

I don't live in Guatemala, Canada, or the U.S. What are my payment options?

Sponsors living in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, or the United Kingdom can make pledge payments into a local account administered by their national Friends of Safe Passage group. Contact michelle@safepassage.org for more information. For all other international sponsors, we recommend online payment via our website or Autopay.

Is my sponsorship considered a tax-deductible donation?

Yes, U.S. citizens may claim a tax deduction for their sponsorship payments and contributions to the Gift Fund. To assist sponsors, we email tax receipts when each payment is processed. If you would prefer to receive a single annual tax receipt, please email michelle@safepassage.org. Some international sponsors making deposits into a local Friends Group account may also be eligible for a tax deduction in their country of residence. Contact your account's administrator for more information.