President’s report AGM 2021

* Welcome – welcome all who are joining us for the 2021 HELP Honduras AGM – thank you for your support and interest
* A special welcome to Lurvin Auceda, educator for AYO, the non-governmental organization which is overseen by a Board of Honduran Rotarians. This group is our ‘boots on the ground’ in the markets and barrios in and around Tegucigalpa and Comayagua. They are passionate, hard working and dedicated to changing lives and making a difference in their country. They deliver programs and supervise our students as well as supporting their families. They ensure that our students have the very best chance to stay in school and succeed. We refer to them as ‘staff’. Lurvin will explain how the educational support has changed due to the pandemic this past year and provide some details on the breadth of programs offered.
* We have had a very successful year but the pandemic has made it challenging as H.E.L.P. Honduras has had to change the way we would normally do business
* In the past, a team of Rotarians would head to Honduras in late January of every year and spend a week or more visiting the programs, taking pictures of the students to be enrolled, meeting with staff and doing a general auditing of the money we have sent to Honduras.

This year we were not able to travel to Honduras so had to do things differently

* We had the staff take the pictures of our enrolled students which was made difficult as they were in a lockdown – therefore students and families were unable to travel to the office for the picture to be taken – it took a while for these to be gathered as the lockdown was eased, then they were sent to us. There were some glitches which has caused delays in us getting the pictures out to donors
* We would normally have face to face meetings with the staff and the Rotarians in Honduras who oversee the program but this year we have had to do this virtually. We have had a number of ZOOM conference calls with them to better understand how the pandemic has effected the students we support and how we can best help them help the students be successful.
* As most of you know, children in Honduras must show up to enrol in school with a uniform, backpack, school books, supplies and shoes. The single moms who walk the streets selling slices of watermelon or have a tortilla stand making less than $2.50/day cannot provide these so our sponsorship dollars pay for these items which allows our children to attend school. - but as it did here and in the US the model for delivering education changed with the pandemic. It went to on online platform. This meant that the support we were providing needed to change.
* Therefore money which had in the past gone to backpacks, books, shoes, uniforms supplies needed to be redirected to cell phones and data packages so that students could access the online courses that were being offered
* Throughout this whole process, due to the diligence of AYO and the tenacity of our students we have been incredibly successful in keeping students connected to their education. It will allow them to be well situated when school does eventually get back to normal
* When we traveled to Honduras in the past we would look at the books, get receipts and generally ensure that the financials were in line but this year we had to have that information sent to us. We will continue to look at them, then meet virtually with our Rotarian friends in Honduras and the staff to determine what support might look like over the next while.
* The HELP directors have had a number of ZOOM conference calls and I want to thank them as they are so thoughtful and truly dedicated to this program. They have helped guide the Society carefully through these strange times.
* In the past I would have gotten around to visit a number of Rotary clubs and done presentations at their meetings. This past year I did that virtually which was less personal.
* Our sponsors have been incredibly generous, supportive and understanding. They have supported the program as well this crazy year as they have in the past.
* When thinking about what I wanted to communicate today I was reminded of the ancient African proverb – ‘It takes a village to raise a child’ a proverb that means an entire community of people must interact with children for those children to grow in a safe and healthy environment
* I want to thank you all, and the many other sponsors that we have, for being part of that global village. Every year of support that you provide improves a child’s life chances

Respectfully submitted by

Michael Balahura, President, H.E.L.P. Honduras