



Community Ascent Network

Newsletter - July, 2025

This year, our work with Piñán has reached a galvanizing milestone!

In September 2025, our first university students will enter their final semesters. The projects they are envisioning to bring back to their community are truly groundbreaking.

We are preparing for the next phase—and ready to witness the real impact our programs will have in Piñán!



Our first trip back to Piñán in two years

In the first week of July 2025, I returned to Piñán to take part in a beautifully adorned celebration—the school's fourth consecutive high school graduation ceremony. I was also there to meet the new team of teachers and conduct interviews with the families of the students we are supporting.

This year's cohort included a full group of 18 graduates—9 from Piñán and 9 from the neighboring community of Guanani. Extended families from both communities filled the school grounds, where the ceremony took place.

This occasion even brought representatives to the community from both the Cotacachi District of Education and *UNORCAC* (*Unión de Organizaciones Campesinas Indígenas de Cotacachi*), each sending a director to lead the ceremony and present diplomas and caps to the graduates. It was the first time either director had visited the school—a powerful recognition of the community's growing achievement!



Project Impact Statistics

As of July 2025:

49 students from the community have earned their high school diplomas since a full secondary program was introduced in Piñán in 2021.



8 full-time teachers are now permanently assigned to the Instituto Educativo Abelardo Morán Muñoz in Piñán.



4 women from the community have completed post-secondary technical certifications as nursing and odontology assistants.



3 students are currently enrolled in university programs and are entering their final semesters to complete their theses and practicum placements.



An Emotional and Candid Interview with the Families

During this trip, the time I spent visiting the families of students turned out to be among the most touching and impactful experiences I've ever had in Piñán.

The Yacelga, Burga, and Obando families are all supporting their sons' and daughters' decisions to continue their studies beyond Piñán. I was warmly invited to share dinner in each of their homes, and later, to bring everyone together for a group interview to talk about their thoughts and feelings on the journey their children have embarked upon.

This deeply emotional and candid conversation took place at sunset, in the packed-earth courtyard of the Yacelga family compound. Both parents from each household paused their after-work chores to sit down and speak from the heart—sharing just how proud they are of their children's remarkable achievements.



What Families Are Saying About Our Student Programs

During our group conversation, as each parent took turns sharing their perspectives, three common themes emerged—expressed with honesty, emotion, and deep reflection:

● **A Once-Unimaginable Opportunity**

Each parent spoke of how this opportunity was beyond anything they had imagined possible. They described it as a unique and life-changing chance—not only for their sons and daughters, but for their entire families and communities. Many reflected on their own backgrounds of modest means and physically demanding labor, expressing how education could open a new path for the next generation. They viewed this opportunity as a turning point, a chance to set an example for younger siblings and others in the community.

● **A Collective Family Decision**

All families shared that choosing to let their children study in a faraway city was not an easy decision. There was mutual understanding that it would require sacrifice from all members of the family. Yet, after heartfelt discussions among parents, siblings, and students, they all agreed—it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that had to be embraced.

● **Growth and Transformation**

Again and again, they remarked on the personal growth they've witnessed in their children—how through access to high school and post-secondary education, students have grown in ability, confidence, and determination. These qualities, parents said, are allowing them to dream and begin planning how they can bring real, tangible change to their community.

A Lasting Impression

While in Ecuador, I had the opportunity, together with Program Coordinator Miguel, to visit each of the university students at the apartments provided by CAN, and on the campuses where they study. Spending an afternoon with each of them, I saw firsthand just how much they've grown and opened up through this opportunity.

Each student shared a clear and determined vision of how they plan to use their education and newly acquired skills to bring meaningful, community-benefiting projects back to Piñán. Their ideas ranged from launching agricultural initiatives that would allow for high-yield production on limited land, to developing tourism ventures that promote local culture and agency, to introducing medical and dental services in a community that has never had access to such care. Three of the students even spoke of their aspirations to pursue master's degrees or medical doctorates in their fields—demonstrating that they haven't lost sight of the original vision of this program, nor of the immense value of the opportunity they've been given.

This visit left me with a profound sense of hope. It affirmed that this project has the potential to create lasting change—not only for the community's future, but for each family's financial stability and well-being. I returned with a renewed commitment to continue supporting these students and to find solutions that will help their dreams—and the dreams of others—to become reality in the years ahead.

Call to Action: Monthly Giving and Learning More

All of the interviews conducted with students and their families from this past trip were filmed and recorded. We are working on a short feature-film to share with all of you to provide more insight into the difference which we are making.

All of the hope and gratitude expressed by the students and families in Piñán is only possible thanks to the continued support of our donors and network of friends.

A growing number of supporters have now joined our monthly giving program—ensuring that our students can keep pursuing their dreams without interruption. With just a few more of these essential monthly contributions, we'll be able to extend the same life-changing opportunities to the newest graduating class.

To learn more about how you can get involved, please visit our website or reach out to our team by phone or email—we'd love to hear from you.



Folk In The Forest

The Folk in the Forest Music Festival will be taking place on Saturday, August 23rd from 2-8pm in Appleton, ON.

Tickets are now on sale at www.ticketsplease.ca or through www.communityascent.com

All funds raised in FOTF will go to support our university and high school programs in Piñán, Ecuador.



Ian Tamblyn's headliner set at FITF 2024

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