



AP COVID food relief manager, Mili Valcarcel, delivering aid to a family living in a floating hut on the outskirts of Belen. 2020

**UPDATE**

**End of Year 2020**

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## From the desk of Patty Webster

The COVID-19 crisis reminds us all how important it is to take care of ourselves, our communities, and our planet. With so much loss, we are also reminded why it is important to find joy in each day and share our love with family, friends, and neighbors – and to reach out to those in need. For all of us at Amazon Promise, as horrifying as it has been to experience the loss of dear friends and colleagues over the last year, we are so very thankful to be on the ground (as we have been since day one), distributing PPE to healthcare workers, feeding hungry families, and providing medical assistance to all who arrive at our door asking for help. We couldn't do it without your generous support! Your outpouring of love and concern drives us and keeps us energized as we face new challenges every day.

A second wave of COVID is now hitting Iquitos (and all of Peru) and is very reminiscent of last Spring with all too familiar scenes of overflowing hospitals, patients on stretchers or sitting in chairs in the corridors, and desperate family members dragging large empty oxygen tanks around the city looking for a place to fill them to save the life of their loved one. Shockingly, those businesses offering to fill tanks for free are being threatened and physically attacked by the “oxygen mafia” who sell it for exorbitantly inflated prices that few can afford.

With the loss of so many healthcare professionals over the last year, and 30% of remaining caregivers now infected, Dr. Carlos Calampa, Regional Director of Health, has confessed that hospitals receiving COVID patients are deeply understaffed and can only safely provide ventilators to 33 patients due to the lack of trained staff. Two of our own staff members who recently traveled to Iquitos from their jungle community for general medical care are now infected and remain in quarantine.

Thankfully, the first shipment of 300,000 Sinopharm vaccines arrived in Peru on February 7th and are being administered to frontline healthcare workers as we speak. As of February 15th, nearly 2500 healthcare professionals in Iquitos have received the vaccine. After the loss of so many physicians, nurses, and other hospital staff, these vaccines offer hope and the promise of a safer working environment. In the meantime, we are preparing to distribute food packages to families again, if needed. As always, it is so reassuring to be backed by such a dedicated and hardworking staff in Peru, as well as our volunteers in the US and abroad, and our generous supporters. We have been extremely fortunate to work with so many selfless and caring people and could not do the work we do without you.

Thank you again for all your support!  
Patty

## 2020

In February, we were fortunate to once again work with Dr. Thomas Melgar from the Western Michigan Stryker MD School of Medicine. With over 59 team members (25 volunteers from UWM, 4 from Penn State Medical School, and 30 AP staff), this was the largest medical team in our 28-year history. (See graph of all patients seen, at the end of this newsletter) We were able to divide up and cover three communities each day. This means three boats to accommodate three complete teams of physicians, dentists, laboratory technicians, educators, interpreters, general staff, and pharmacy. The logistics were mind-boggling, but with our well-experienced Peruvian staff we were able to successfully meet our schedule. Several patients were brought back to Iquitos for further testing and treatment. Please see three-time volunteer, Dr. Emily Cordes' article included in this newsletter.



Dr. Thomas Melgar attending to an elderly couple, Feb. 2020

**In the midst of the pandemic, we were able to move forward with some of our other programs.**

### Rainwater Catchment Systems for Potable Water

The UN Sustainable Development Goal target 6.1 calls for universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water.



AP Special Projects Manager, Jose Luis Valles, proudly filling up his water bottle in the community of Libertad, Dec. 2020

Working together with our partners from the Sonoma, California professional chapter of Engineers Without Borders, we installed the first rainwater catchment systems in 2014 in the remote jungle villages of Jaldar and Jerusalem. Since then, thanks to our collaboration with several EWB chapters and private citizens, 14 other communities now have clean water systems. With the accessibility of clean water, we have witnessed the incredible improvement in the health and well-being of the people in each of these villages. Clean water is a human right and critical to survival. Its absence impacts the health, food security, and livelihoods of families across the world.

In 2020, Amazon Promise Special Projects Manager, Jose Luis Valles, worked with EWB Sonoma, another long-time partner EWB Central Houston, and our newest partner EWB Detroit, to plan and build three catchment systems in the communities of San Francisco (pop. 600), Grau (pop. 450) and Libertad (pop. 450). An incredible and heroic feat during a raging pandemic!

When water comes from improved and more accessible sources, people spend less time and effort physically collecting it, which allows them to be more productive in other ways. This can also result in greater personal safety by reducing the need to make long or risky journeys to collect water. Better water sources also mean less expenditure on health, as people are less likely to fall ill and incur medical expenses. As such, they remain economically productive. With children particularly at risk from waterborne diseases, access to improved sources of water can result in better health and improved school attendance, with positive longer-term consequences for their lives (World Health Organization).

In 2021, four systems are planned for the communities of Prado (pop. 160), Yucuruchi (pop. 350), Puerto Sol (pop. 230) and San Rafael de Tapirillo (pop. 360). Working with EWB Central Houston, three pilot toilets and a floating dock will also be constructed in the community of Prado.

We are eternally grateful to Jose Luis Valles, and all our Engineers Without Borders partners for their dedication to improving lives, bringing clean water to all!

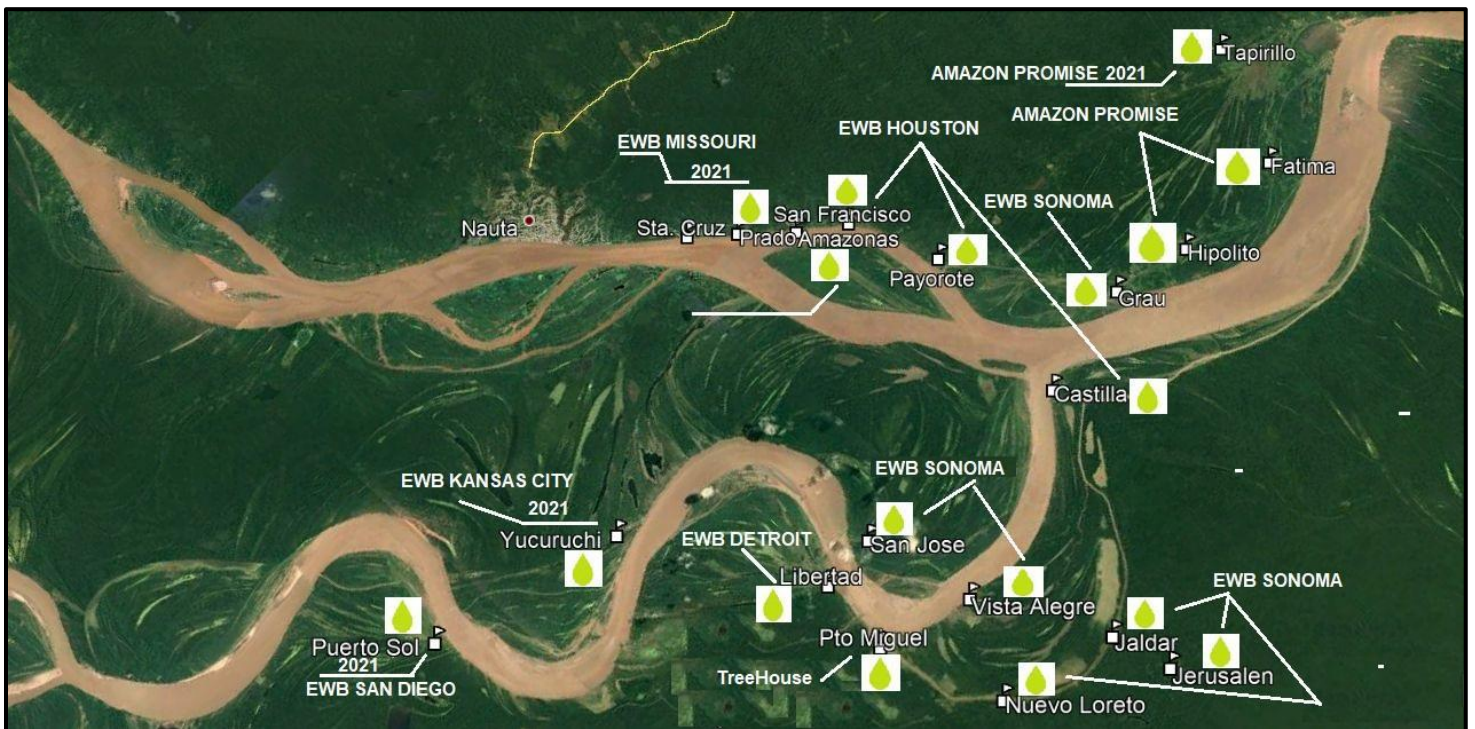




Clean water for the communities of Grau and Libertad, October, and December 2020.



Team members from EWB Central Houston and Amazon Promise, in the community of San Francisco, Marañón River, Feb. 2020



Map showing where systems are already installed and those programmed for 2021.



## Family Planning



We're proud of these women taking charge of their reproductive health!

of family planning in lieu of Implanon, and six women refused any other family planning options. Six women moved away leaving no forwarding information.

Our successful three-year family planning program concluded in November 2020. Throughout the course of the program, we were able to follow the progress of almost all the women participants. Fifty-one women from nine jungle communities received Implanon arm implants in November 2017. Of these 51, 24 women completed the full three years. Twenty-one had the implant removed early due to prolonged heavy menstruation, nausea, or headaches. A small percentage of women removed them for religious or other personal reasons. Fifteen of these 21 women have continued with other forms



In November 2020, our team traveled two hours on the one and only road leading out of Iquitos, to the jungle port town of Nauta, where they met up with a team of family planning medical staff from the local medical center to host a one-day family planning program. Twenty-four women traveled by boat from their communities to attend. The program included a full day of continued family planning education, medical care, and final removal of the implants. We have since started a second group which includes many women from the first program, as well as new participants. We will continue to monitor their well-being throughout the year. We are grateful for the opportunity to work with the Nauta Medical Center, offering an array of family planning options. We are planning to include more women from other communities in our group later in the year and look forward to reporting on our progress.



AP team members with medical staff from the Nauta family planning program, November 2020.

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## ¡Soy Capaz! Education Program in 2020

Elena Deem, PhD  
Director of Education



AP Director of Education Elena Deem, PhD, provides HIV prevention education in the community of Amazonas, Feb. 2020.

surprisingly, they were little-known topics in those parts of the world, and we were kept busy holding workshops, public lectures, and individual counseling sessions.

In February of 2020, ¡Soy Capaz! had a successful trip to the Pacaya – Samiria region on the Marañón river. My Spanish friend, Juan Jurado, came along as a volunteer, and so our team was able to join three separate medical groups each day, reaching more than twice as many people than usual. We attended to villages we'd never visited before, gauging and comparing their level of knowledge about HIV-prevention, and women's rights/domestic violence with that of our regularly attended communities. Not



Volunteer Juan Jurado providing HIV education, Feb. 2020.



Workshop participants from Soy Capaz, Amazon Promise and CEM, March 2020.

In March, upon our return from our remote trip back to Iquitos, ¡Soy Capaz! held a workshop titled *Violence Disguised as Love* in our Belen clinic. My assistant Adelaida, who had been organizing trainings and workshops for our stakeholders through the Emergency Center for Women (CEM) for over a year, coordinated the event with this Peruvian institution. We invited women stakeholders from the area and shared the platform with the CEM leaders. The next day, ¡Soy Capaz! lent its educational expertise and assistance to an Amazon Promise Cervical Cancer prevention workshop held by Peruvian doctors and nurses.

But we returned to our respective countries on the wings of the beginnings of the Covid pandemic. In May, Adelaida, beloved by all of the AP team for her kindness, humbleness and dedication, died of Covid-19 complications in Iquitos. She had lived with HIV for 16 years and worked tirelessly on HIV prevention. Her brother, a physician, passed a month after her. This was a terrible blow to me personally, and to our ¡Soy Capaz! team.

In June, two other assistants, also living with HIV, tested positive for Covid. Working with Adriana, our amazing Iquitos Office Coordinator, we did our best to make sure they were cared for by getting enough food, all the necessary medicines, and medical check-ups. Fortunately, both of our assistants recovered. Many other people, mostly HIV-positive, were added to our help list during the remaining months of the year of 2020.

In the summer of 2020, Mili, our ¡Soy Capaz! assistant, worked with Patty and Adriana, delivering bags of food to people in need. Mili also provided Covid-prevention education as she handed out the food to the hundreds of people in the poorest Iquitos neighborhoods and in the river villages.



Adelaida Shupingahua  
1965 - 2020



In October, we coordinated the participation of Amazon Promise and ¡Soy Capaz! staff at a 6-week, WHO-approved training program on Healthcare and Health Education, sponsored by Wired International. The event was organized by the US/Peruvian NGO, Project Amazonas, on their safe premises in a jungle lodge.

Although Covid has placed many hurdles in our way, we have done important work nevertheless, thanks to our incredible AP and ¡Soy Capaz! teams in Iquitos. I have remained busy coordinating from afar, and I am awaiting my return to Peru to set up our team as soon as the situation allows.

My sincere gratitude and thanks go to our sponsors, our ¡Soy Capaz! assistant Mili, and our incredible Iquitos coordinator, Adriana.



Soy Capaz assistant Mili Valcarcel, along with AP office manager Adriana Calizaya, distributing emergency funds to the elderly, August 2020.

## Emily Cordes, DO

Western Michigan University School of Medicine  
Internal Medicine/Pediatrics at Root Functional Medicine  
Grand Rapids, MI



Dr. Emily Cordes attends to a young patient during February 2020 medical clinics.

It seems odd to not be preparing for an Amazon Promise February/March trip in 2021. For the last few years, I have found myself squishing jars of peanut butter and bars of dark chocolate (jungle necessities) into a suitcase already overpacked with medical supplies. This is obviously an unprecedented year with international travel practically grinding to a halt. The news out of Iquitos from Amazon Promise about the havoc COVID has created in the Amazon is heartbreaking. Many lives have been lost and I anticipate that healthcare in the Amazon has been changed forever, as it has here in the states. If there is a silver lining to a global pandemic, however, it may be that it has given us time to reflect on our past experiences.

I have been on three AP trips, two as a resident and then in 2020 returning as volunteer faculty for Western Michigan University School of Medicine. Each trip has been incredible and it's difficult to pick just one story to share. I have seen countless parents bring their children to a clinic to ensure that they are healthy. I have witnessed the change that occurs when a community gets a

new water system; one year we treat almost everyone for gastrointestinal parasites and the next year we visit a healthy, thriving community. I have handed out countless tubes of antifungal cream and bars of soap. I have witnessed many elders, who have slowly lost their sight, pick up a pair of glasses and be able to read again. This list may sound mundane, but I believe these small actions add up to creating and sustaining health in a community.



February 2020 volunteer team photo after finishing up the last clinic day of the trip, working in Belen. Little did we know this would be the last clinic day of the year. Photo taken March 6<sup>th</sup>, just days before COVID-19 was detected in Iquitos.

I have had several people ask what brings me back to the Amazon, and they have all probably heard different answers. In general, though, it goes back to the incredible people I have been honored to meet along the way. Last year I met a 70-year-old man who asked me to make a house call to visit his mother. I love house calls, so I was eager to go. At his home, I met his mother, who was born in 1915 (I did the math several times in my head that day....yes she was 105 years old). Even after crouching down, I towered above this tiny woman, as she asked me if I could fix her arthritis and her sight. Before we left her home, I asked her how she made it to 105 years old. She said it was simple, she ate the fish out of the river, plantains and yuca that she grew, kept moving and loved her family. She was sharp as a tack at 105 years old. I have been thinking about her response ever since I met her. It dawned on me a few weeks ago that this woman possibly witnessed two global pandemics. I wish I could ask her for advice on living during a pandemic. I wonder if she would have the same response: eat well, keep moving, love your family.



Having the right equipment makes all the difference! Medical team members providing an ultrasound scan, Feb. 2020.

I so wish I were packing a suitcase full of supplies right now. Each year I go, I hone a list of necessities that I won't go without (coffee and duct tape). This year, instead of packing for a trip, I'm planning on unpacking all the wisdom and knowledge that the Amazonian people have given me.



Dr. Gabriel Kousourou and interpreter Simona Sulcova attend to an elderly woman suffering with a high fever and anemia, Feb. 2020.



Our team divided up each day to provide care in three communities.

The Amazon Promise team has been on the ground in Iquitos working non-stop since March of last year when the COVID-19 pandemic first began to infect people of Iquitos. Although we were forced to cancel our scheduled volunteer medical expeditions, we quickly pivoted our focus to other areas of outreach, including the distribution of PPE to frontline healthcare workers, feeding thousands of people without access to food during the months of strict lockdown, providing economic aid to the elderly and single mothers, and to becoming advocates for people suffering from long-term post-virus health issues. Once the quarantine was lifted and people could travel on the rivers again, the requests for help







Salma is battling bilateral hydronephrosis.

began pouring in. Many of the people knocking on our door have not been able to get even basic medical care for the last year. In turn, chronic issues that have gone unchecked have now caused a health crisis. We have seen patients with cervical and stomach cancer, gastrointestinal disorders, pulmonary disease, severe dermatologic conditions, chronic kidney and liver disease, necrotic diabetic ulcers, untreated TB – this is only a small sample of the patients who have sought our help.

With healthcare workers on extended strike, only ER services are available, yet the extremely sick are still often unable to get care because the hospitals are overwhelmed. This is where Amazon Promise has stepped in! People are suffering tremendously and reaching out to us every day – and we never turn anyone away. In addition to medical care, many require ongoing assistance with lab testing, radiologic imaging, acquiring appointments with private specialists, surgeries, funds for medication and testing, lodging and transportation, particularly for those coming in from the jungle who have nowhere to stay and nothing to eat. Our team is out there every day, dedicated to helping as many people as possible. *(Note: All patients pictured have given Amazon Promise permission to display their photos.)*

We are extremely thankful to Adriana Calizaya, Amazon Promise Office Manager and patient advocate, for her relentless devotion to the work we do and the communities we serve.



Help for those with chronic health issues. Handi is 25, and although always has a smile on her face, she suffers terribly from a painful debilitating connective tissue disorder. She has come a long way from when we first met her in her jungle community. Handi is one of several people with debilitating chronic issues that we are providing aid to.



Jesy is 5 months old and was born with both a cleft lip and palate. Her mother came to our door asking for help with purchasing formula. Jesy will eventually have surgery once the hospitals are able to perform these types of procedures again.

Painting by Grimaldo.



Antonio is a year old and was suffering from diarrhea, dehydration, and malnutrition.



Grimaldo is from the community of Vista Alegre on the lower Ucayali River, where Amazon Promise has worked for many years. Although extremely sick, he was able to travel to Iquitos in early November 2020 to seek help at the AP office. After a grueling month of testing, he was diagnosed with stomach cancer, and had surgery in December. We were able to assist and accompany Grimaldo every step of the way and are pleased to announce he's doing well and will begin a six-month course of chemotherapy at the end of February.



To see more photos of Amazon Promise February medical clinics, [AP 2020 Medical Clinics](#)  
For photos of our COVID-19 relief work in 2020, [COVID Relief 2020](#)

## Barbara C. Erny, MD



Dr. Barbara Erny attending to a family in the Achuar native community of Wararai.

My trips with Amazon Promise have been an inspiration for life after retirement. For 26 years I practiced ophthalmology in Sunnyvale, California, but have always been drawn to service in the developing world.

Now I have a new role as Medical Liaison for International Programs with the American Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgery Foundation. I am working with local physicians and NGOs to strengthen ophthalmology training and delivery of eye care in Ethiopia and beyond. Patty Webster and I are also collaborating to help the indigenous people of the Amazon get the eye surgery they need.

Volunteering with Amazon Promise has also exposed me to an irreplaceable ecosystem. The Amazon basin is known as “the lungs of the world” and my visits there have inspired me to devote efforts to the mitigation of climate change. With the Brazilian fires burning out of control to satisfy the world’s increasing desire for beef, the residents of the Amazon basin face increasing health risks. The smoke is causing residents to have more problems with asthma and cardiopulmonary disease. Food and water insecurity from habitat loss, heat stroke from rising temperatures, infectious diseases from flooding, not to mention psychological stresses, are just a few of the health challenges we now face. Indeed, climate change has been declared by the WHO as the biggest threat to human health in the 21st century.

I’m working with Physicians for Social Responsibility environmental division to educate students, health care workers and the public about our climate crisis. I have the privilege of mentoring Stanford medical students on their quest to learn more about environmental issues, “green” healthcare, and fight for climate justice and equity.

All of us can do our part. Advocate for more renewable energy. Take home a doggy bag to reduce food waste. Donate to Amazon Promise, or volunteer and feel the joy that comes with giving service to those less fortunate.



We are eternally grateful to Amazon Promise board member Kristina Server (left) for her 15 years of dedicated service as our Director of Strategic Development, overseeing fundraising efforts, communications, and other organizational priorities. As one of our founding members, she has helped to build and strengthen our organization both in the US and in Peru. Thank you, Kristina, for your selfless commitment over the years!

## Total Patients Attended and Humanitarian Aid Received 2020 - 7110

Note: These are medical and dental patient numbers combined seen in our clinics during our February 25<sup>th</sup> – March 5<sup>th</sup> medical outreach clinics, and COVID-19 relief aid provided to families and individuals during the year.

	February 25th - March 5th	April, May, June, July, August, September →	Oct., Nov., Dec.	
	MEDICAL CLINICS FEB./MARCH: Communities of: Pacaya Samiria National Reserve, Santa Rita de Florida, San Jose, Sarpanga, 20 de Enero, Buenos Aires, Bello Horizonte, 23 de Junio, San Jacinto, San Regis, San Pedro I, II, Gran Punta, San Jorge, Jose Olaya, Bagazan, Santa Fe, Villa Canan, Villa Buen Pastor, Nuevo San Juan, Nuevo Porvenir, City of Belen/Sachachorro	HUMANITARIAN AID COVID-19, Delivery of food baskets, financial aid, and Medicines to 914 families in jungle communities of the lower Ucayali and Marañon Rivers, and neighborhoods of Iquitos, Belen and its surroundings.	Family Planning, and other patients seen	TOTAL
Men 15+	557	0	17	574
Women 15 +	828	0	53	881
Boys 6-14	343	0	0	343
Girls 6- 14	358	0	1	359
Boys 0- 5	191	0	3	194
Girls 0- 5	185	0	4	189
*Total approximate amount of individuals served*	0	4570*	0	0
Clinic Patients	2462	0	78	2540

## Make a Donation

Amazon Promise relies on private support to fund operations, expand services, and provide a wide range of care to impoverished communities in Peru. [Make a Donation](#) from our website via Paypal

## Monetary Gifts

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Amazon Promise  
P.O. Box 1304  
Newburyport, MA, 01950  
USA

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Facebook page for the  
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## Trip Dates 2021

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our 2021 medical volunteer trips have been postponed until further notice.

Please continue checking our website, or if you would like to be notified of new dates, contact us at: [expeditions@amazonpromise.org](mailto:expeditions@amazonpromise.org)

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Jose Luis Valles, Special Projects Manager/Interpreter  
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