

## CYC Takes Students to Guatemala

Manny Gonzalez and I led five students from Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) Futures Academy on an 11-day service-learning trip to Guatemala through our partnership with Limitless Horizons Ixil (LHI). CYC sponsored the opening and operations of LHI's library, which is the first and only library in the small, rural community of Chajul. In 2009, CYC sent the first group of students to Guatemala to help paint and finish the library building. The following year we participated in the library's first Story Hour. This year, we were able to see the new, large, bright space for the library and participate in another Story Hour and other activities with the kids.

We spent six days in Chajul, where they speak an indigenous language called Ixil and continue to honor many of their Mayan traditions. Futures Academy students had the chance to completely immerse themselves into the life and culture of Chajul, and they took advantage of every opportunity! We had an Ixil lesson, made traditional meals in families' homes, and learned how to weave. We also participated in the community clean up initiative. In addition, these young men and women taught hip hop dance, basketball, and art workshops to local LHI youth.

As a group we met nightly to process our experiences in Chajul and to make connections to themes like poverty, the effects of the 36 –year-long Civil War in Guatemala, injustice, culture, and education. We heard from so many local youth and adults who value education and believe that it is vital to their sense of power, their hope, their future, and even their survival. I know that this experience had a tremendous impact on our students and will hopefully change their perspectives and influence their choices in the future. It was an amazing experience, with so many moments and memories that I will forever carry with me. I think that we are all a little different, and hopefully a little better, because of it. Rebbecka Jackson, a third year Futures and Community College of Aurora student who participated in the trip, said, "Some of the best lessons are worth traveling to find."