In 1996, Concern America began supporting autonomous education in communities in Chiapas, starting in a single small community with the start of a school. The first promoters of education were formed, who later would be in charge of running and operating that school.

The program grew and in 1997, education promoter (teacher) training workshops were being held not only in that one community, but in all those that made up the municipality of 17 de Noviembre. The workshops trained more than 100 education and health promoters.

Years passed and by 1999, the education program expanded again, covering 13 municipalities that formed the area in which this work has continued throughout all these years. The Education Commission was then created, which is now in charge of planning, regulating, and building autonomous education for the entire area.

Over the years the area regrouped in different ways to help coordinate the education system, becoming 3 large municipalities with 13 sub-regions.

During that year, the first education caravan visited all the regions of the area to speak with the towns, with parents, authorities, etc. on the importance of getting involved and supporting autonomous education. This caravan was carried out with the entire Education Commission to also make themselves known in each village.

In each community a primary school began to function regardless of resources, regardless of the lack of a school building, giving classes in houses, auditoriums, and outdoors, none of which prevented them from continuing to grow and flourish. The education and all the schools were and are autonomous, maintained by the towns and parents themselves.
At the end of the year during the celebrations/evaluations, the first student meeting was held. Known as “the party where the light of hope is born,” the gathering included students from all of the primary schools. Since then, they have continued holding these meetings in each municipality to further evaluate and celebrate.

Our job continued to be to train education promoters and support the Education Commission in achieving the goals and objectives that the communities had set, always considering that our efforts would be aimed at supporting their path and not interfering in their process and decisions.

In 2001, the first high school in the entire area began “weaving the Mayan wisdom” where students came from all the communities to study in this community-led school. After the good results of this first high school and seeing the increase in students, over the years, autonomous high schools have formed in each of the regions and municipalities in which we work.

Also from this first high school came what was the first technical team in the area, students who began to train in the elaboration, design and editing of the classroom materials, so that in the future they could continue creating all new materials for school subjects, in their indigenous languages.
From the beginning and until now, starting with a single little school, autonomous education has grown and prospered, with now more than 200 primary schools and 15 high schools in operation. There are 4,500 students annually and more than 300 educators in charge of the schools.

In this time there have been many changes, regroupings, difficulties, times to stop and evaluate, times to move forward, and times to wait, but it has also been a time to learn and create a path. For 25 years, we have been fortunate to participate and see education grow in communities where government schools did not exist or if they did, they did not work. 25 years accompanying the communities in the whole process of creating education for the next generations. 25 years working alongside the Education Commission that has worked hard (and continue to work hard) to end high illiteracy that occurs in the state of Chiapas, starting from zero, learning together with the first students. All of this to support the community to achieve the dream of having their own schools, where quality, bilingual education is accessible and above all, it is an education based in dignity and respect.

We have been lucky enough to be able to live this experience, to be in the process, living the changes, the difficulties, the joys and pains, but above all, 25 years that have given us the experience and satisfaction all to see so many goals and so many dreams fulfilled.