2005

Helping Build Communities

Laura Graham '07

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol1/iss3/10

This article is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.
Helping build communities

Linfield College students left more than a newly constructed softball field and a freshly painted mural in Mexico last spring. They also left dozens of new friends and a bit of themselves.

The 11 students, who studied in Oaxaca for the semester, spent three weeks of service learning at Pimpollo orphanage, in the southernmost part of Mexico. There they drew upon their own skills and interests to help disadvantaged children. They painted a mural, built a softball field, and taught swimming lessons, English classes and kitchen hygiene.

The three-week experience went beyond examining cross-cultural issues and strengthening Spanish language skills, according to Tom Love, Linfield professor of anthropology, who directed the program.

“It was really about developing relationships,” he said. “These types of experiences build character and develop an attitude of citizenship, mutual respect, critical self-reflection and responsibility.”

Mary Doyle ’06, a studio art and political science major, painted a mural based on more than 70 drawings created by the children. The result was a sign for the orphanage incorporating flowers and a beach scene, with the kids’ blue hand prints creating ocean waves.

“Painting is a creative outlet that encourages kids to be themselves as opposed to their economic circumstances,” said Doyle.

At the orphanage, Linfield students came face-to-face with issues of poverty, domestic violence, child abuse and retardation. The children’s need for attention was palpable, Love said.

“You’re instantly mobbed by kids who come up and hug you,” he added. “And they care for each other.”

Linfield College students learned it could happen in just three days.

As Jordan put it, “What we did feels better than any class work, field trips and community service projects.

How long does it take to build a future? Some Linfield College students learned it could happen in just three days.

Working tirelessly alongside a Nicaraguan named Oscar, they transformed a bare concrete foundation into the house of Oscar’s dreams.

The 17 Linfield students spent a weekend in September building houses for Habitat for Humanity in San Ramón, Costa Rica, as part of the Linfield semester abroad program. Based at the Universidad de Costa Rica in San José, the program provides opportunities to learn about the country’s culture, history and traditions through class work, field trips and community service projects.

“When one of the Habitat coordinators asked whether anyone had anything to say about what had been accomplished in the three days, Oscar could not even get a word out, because his eyes had welled up with so many tears,” said Lisa Anderson ’06 of Salem.

“The tiny Habitat houses that these people receive are more than most of them could have ever dreamed of.”

The weekend trip gave the Linfield students the chance to roll up their sleeves and work side-by-side with locals, an important element in Linfield study-abroad experiences.

“We believe in service learning and volunteer work,” said Maya Herrera, director of the Linfield semester program in Costa Rica. “In the past, students have developed projects in small groups or individually, but this year we decided to work as a whole team, making the volunteer work more effective.”

Prior to the weekend, students spent two weeks learning construction vocabulary, such as carretilla (wheelbarrow) and pala (shovel), and preparing for their tasks in San Ramón, a semi-rural town with a population of over 33,000.

Rebekah Jordan ’07 of Tigard described it as a community “nestled between rolling green hills and sprawling farmlands, where the air is clean and fresh and there are no stoplights on the wide roads.”

The work began as soon as the students entered San Ramón. A tour of other Habitat houses gave them their first chance to interact with the local community.

“It was special to see all of the children and pets happily running around (the Habitat houses),” said Kirsten Taylor ’06 of Seattle. “I knew that their lives had been touched by volunteers like us.”

The students assembled rebar, laid concrete blocks, shoveled rocks and made cement and mortar in a unique sifting process. They worked alongside the homeowners, who applied their own sweat equity.

The days were tough with extreme weather conditions, ranging from drenching rain to scorching sun and high humidity. But as the weekend progressed, students began to notice changes in themselves and the group.

“They started to notice what they were accomplishing in our days on the job,” said Elise Booth ’05 of Geneseo, Idaho. “We took pride in our work and what we accomplished in our days on the job.”

Booth and her classmates were deeply moved by the experience. She said the opportunity to form personal bonds with the Costa Ricans was life changing.

“I came away with a satisfaction at having been a part of something bigger and more important than my own little world,” Jordan said. “I felt so right to expend energy on something that would bring me no visible benefit, but the profit I gained was in the hope-filled eyes of the owner of the house as we worked side-by-side and he watched his future come together.”

Every year a new group of Linfield students will venture to Costa Rica in late summer. They will also perform acts of community service, maybe similar, maybe different. Although the names, faces and scenes will change, Oscar and his neighbors will never forget the hard work of those 17 students. Nor will the Linfield students forget the experiences and lessons of those three days.

As Jordan put it, “What we did feels better than any day spent on a beach.”

— Laura Davis ’07

Developing cross-cultural relationships

Linfield students, from left, Mary Doyle ’06, Veronica Walker ’05 and Vanessa Patterson ’06, help children add handprints to a mural at the Pimpollo orphanage.

When the kids saw us, they would run to help us,” said Crossman, a sociology major. “It was incredibly humbling to see how little they had and hear their stories of what they’d been through.”

Rachyl Stupor ’06, was particularly drawn toAuterilli, a 17-year-old who wanted to learn English and attend college.

“That was surprising to me to find a girl living out in the middle of nowhere that had the same aspirations I do,” Stupor said.

More than anything, the experience showed Stupor how privileged she is as a United States citizen.

She’s now more aware of how people use their resources and how it affects others around the world.

“I’ve never had to endure hardship,” she said. “Some of the kids had very difficult lives before they came to the orphanage. It was hard to face that, but it was an incredible experience.”

— Laura Davis

Emily Pierce ’05 playing with a child.

Helping build communities

Linfield students, left and Meredith Berholtz ’06 were two of 17 Linfield students who helped construct a Habitat for Humanity house in San Ramon, Costa Rica, as part of their semester abroad experience.

Service Learning

WINTER 2005 - 15