

The Ecuador Project



When I first became involved with the St. Thomas Human Rights Society's Ecuador Project last April, I was psyched to have the opportunity to absorb some heat while experiencing a new culture, and doing development work. Well, I had it half right, but... it was COLD up there!

To give you an idea of the altitude at which we were working and living... let us fast forward for a minute to our return flight. Once in the air, with destination USA, the captain came on the PA to inform us that we were flying at the same altitude as the mountain community in which we were living. That is, 2700m, wow!

So, we were a group of 11 Canadians, Ontario through to PEI who were ready to lend our hands to development. We were suppose to be building a school (together with a group from Reid's College in Portland, Oregon), but, as is a common occurrence in development work, the plan soon changed and we were shipped to a different project in a different part of the Andes.

It turned out to be a lucky break in the end. The community we called home, "La Esperanza" is an indigenous community. Its members still live in traditional housing (build mainly of mud and hay, seen to the right), wear traditional dress, and practice evangelicalism (Ecuador is 95% Catholic). We worked hand in hand with an Italian organization called "Ayuda Directa", on several different projects: tree planting at the paramount of the mountain (2900m), painting churches, building bleachers in the community centre, building a fence around the garden were the youth are taught to tend and harvest crops, teaching English to children from all the surrounding communities, and building a bathroom for a school in a neighbouring community.



I was working on the bathroom project which meant hiking 45 minutes morning and night back and forth to the other community: "Gahuijon". The school was build from concert blocks and mortar, the roof of sheet metal, and a trench was dug to lay the water hose. The water source for the bathroom came from a reservoir further up the mountain and the pressure behind it was none but gravity.

When our time on the project had come to an end, there was still a week remaining before the bathroom was to be finished. The picture below is what was complete by our last day in the mountains, with myself, Michele (the founder of Ayuda Directa), the maestro Juan, Ashling Kavanaugh (St. Thomas), and the president of the community.

Now, the experience was amazing, though there were certain obstacles that we faced during the course of the work. Some of these had been anticipated, i.e. gender issues and language barriers. Others, however, hadn't, i.e. community "involvement". The community always wanted to lend a hand with the work, but they also often had different ideas of the way things needed to be done. For instance, we were to be building a fence a way but they took it upon themselves to do it their way instead. I will tend to disagree that the statement: "Many hands make light work", is always true.



All in all it was a wonderful experience. I met some great people, and gained some priceless experiences. I would highly recommend this experience to anyone that has an interest in international development work.



Feel free to contact me, Julie, about how to get involved with the Ecuador Project 2006:

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and also, more pictures available at:

www.bugbitten.com/jules_rules