Jalapa 2015 Volunteer Trip

health education and relief foundation
A group of 17 volunteers traveled to Jalapa, Guatemala from May 17th to May 22nd, 2015, in order to build a chicken coop, clean up and seal the dorm roof, and paint several internal walls as well as a mural at Casa Hogar. With currently around 125 residents, the home will now have access to a cleaner, drier living space and will be supplied with eggs from a coop with a 200-hen capacity. The roof in particular was an issue of some urgency, since the constant influx of water had made some of the bathrooms unusable. Two murals on the outside of the dorm building have made Casa Hogar a much more appealing place to live for its young residents.
The chicken coop was based on a projection prepared by the department of zootechnology at San Carlos University in Jalapa. The students visited Casa Hogar several times and prepared a plan and a cost projection. All planning was done ahead of time with the help of Prof. José Luis Zea, an agricultural engineer from San Carlos.

The volunteers worked tirelessly, and by the time we were finished, the only remaining tasks were placing the chicken wire and adding the internal nesting structure. Both were completed by local hire in September 2015. HEAR was able to hire two of the home's young residents on a part-time basis to take care of the animals over the coming years. As of October 2015, these young women are learning the basics of animal husbandry from the team at University of St. Carlos.

**Lessons Learned**

HEAR personnel should arrive at least one day ahead of the remaining volunteers to ensure prompt delivery of all necessary materials.

If there is more than one project site, every effort should be made to supply each site with a capable translator.
The structure will be finished by our local contacts and ready for 20 “practice chickens” on loan from the University. On site, translator Diana proved an invaluable asset.
Project Leaky Roof

Roof size: ca. 6,000 square feet

Materials: silicone sealant

Status Fall 2015: The roof held up during the rainy season, but additional coats will need to be added regularly during service visits.

Sealing the roof was the most difficult project on this trip by virtue of simple unpredictability. The steps projected were fairly simple: clean off roof surface and apply as many coats of silicone sealant as possible. The reality was somewhat more complicated.

Although our local contact was able to find sufficient silicone sealant and have it transported down to Jalapa in time for our arrival, we found that the concrete surface of the roof had deteriorated to such a degree that hundreds of pounds of rubble had to be removed first. Volunteers spent the better part of two days removing surface material and re-building the water tank system on the roof. Once this was done several coats of sealant were applied, but more will likely be necessary. Given the state of the roof itself as well as local weather conditions, we foresee the necessity of an extended roof structure in the long run. The coating that is in place now should protect Casa Hogar at least for a few years.

Lessons Learned

For long-term protection of the structure, the dorm will have to be roofed over with corrugated sheet metal. Although well-cured concrete should be able to withstand the rains, because of the long distance we cannot rely on local contractors to take proper care.
Physically the roofing job was probably the hardest on our volunteers. Luckily they had some extremely adorable helpers.
Project Indoor/Outdoor Paint

Area painted: Decorative painting on 2 outside walls, re-paint of 2 interior rooms

Status Fall 2015: Happiness.

The painting project was the most successful purely in terms of generating happiness and enthusiasm among our donors, for two reasons: the results were immediate and quite satisfying, and, more importantly, the painters had more opportunity than any of the other volunteers to interact with the girls who live at Casa Hogar.

The girls, especially the youngest, were fascinated by the painting process – to the point where they tried their hardest to participate, even against Madre Claudia’s wishes. The process was a great lesson in communication: the girls interacted with all volunteers despite the language barrier and showed an enormous desire to learn. HEAR should consider how we could harness this enthusiasm particularly for the arts and extend it to other areas of learning.

Lessons Learned

The girls at Casa Hogar respond very positively to an artistic project. In what other ways could we harness this potential?
Muralists at Work

The mural and the inside painting was a great example of cooperation. Several of the volunteers moved around from site to site. The mural itself was based in part on designs prepared by an artist friend of one of our volunteers, and quite a few of the girls' suggestions made it into the picture as well.
As part of the chicken coop projects, HEAR will be able to employ two of the home’s young residents for the foreseeable future. There is virtually no chance for these young ladies to earn a salary outside of the home. The announcement was an incredibly moving experience.

Volunteer feedback was overwhelmingly positive. One participant described the trip as one of the best things he had done in years, and many asked if there would be another trip in the future.
Quite a few of the volunteers found themselves accompanied by a little shadow for the entire time. The girls were enthused with the donations we brought, especially the art supplies and sports equipment! But most of all they responded with great joy to the idea that somewhere out there in a foreign country are people who care for their well-being.
Thank you to all who made this possible.

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