



L&C Nursing Group Serves More than 300 Patients in Rural Guatemalan Clinic over Alternative Spring Break

April 1 2014 8:53 AM

GODFREY – This spring break, seven L&C students, two registered nurses and two administrators traveled to Guatemala, in partnership with the Mustard Seed Peace Project, to establish a rural health clinic to serve the small, rural village of Virginia.

During the trip, members of the group sent updates and photos, which were posted to www.lc.edu/service and shared on Facebook and Twitter for the community to stay connected with the project.

“One of the things that touched all of us was that they said, ‘you are bringing so much to us and we can’t give you anything,’” said L&C Dean of Health Sciences Donna Meyer, reflecting on the trip. “But it was a life changing experience for all of us.”

Located a 10-hour bus ride from Guatemala City, Virginia is home to about 400 people, many of whom who, because of the remoteness of the community, the lack of infrastructure and the fact that employment opportunities are limited, suffer from malnourishment and extreme poverty.

The group arrived in the village on Saturday evening and started setting up the clinic on Sunday.

The community of Virginia showed up en masse the day the clinic was being set up to learn about their opportunity. “It was a really interesting and unique experience. They told us it was going to be at the community center, but we didn’t realize the community center didn’t have walls – it was a pavilion,” Meyer said. “We took the sheets we brought from home to make outside walls, and created four exam rooms to divide the

clinic.”

The group saw patients from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Wednesday, when the clinic was taken down. On Monday, they saw approximately 210 children, followed by 76 women and 52 men over the next two days.

“We saw a variety of things, from respiratory issues to stomach issues to skin irritations. A lot of the issues were due to poor water quality, so they were hard to correct,” Meyer said. “A lot of the children received oral healthcare. We checked teeth and mouths and gave toothbrushes, toothpaste and demos to the parents. That happened every day, no matter who we saw.”

Among the women, the group saw many feminine health issues. Among the men, they saw more diabetes and high blood pressure. Some more serious cases had to be referred to a hospital in Guatemala City.

Although the group had access to certain medications like Ibuprofen and antibiotic ointments, including some supplies from the L&C Nursing Club, they lacked much of what they needed and had to think on their feet.

Students worked with each of the healthcare providers, and rotated throughout the clinic, taking patients’ vital signs and handing out vitamins donated by Saint Anthony’s Hospital and several Lewis and Clark staff members.

“The students did an absolutely amazing job using their critical thinking skills. They worked tirelessly to do everything they could for their patients,” Meyer said.

Although they had translators, the group’s biggest challenge was communication with the village residents. Differences in medical terminology from English to Spanish created a particular challenge, said Vice President of Student Engagement Sean Hill, who worked reception at the makeshift clinic.



Nursing student Elizabeth Sellitto completes a physical examination on one of the families in the clinic. Photo submitted by Lucy Chappee.

Community leaders were present at the clinic every day, and helped the group distribute free Lewis and Clark t-shirts, which went quickly.

Many of the people had relatively open homes, not sealed from the elements, and many homes had outhouses. Some people had separate cooking areas outside their homes under a canopy. It was common to see turkeys and chickens just walking nearby. A lot of the women and children carried things on their heads, and many wore clothing that one might see in the United States, which were probably donated, Hill said.

“It was humbling and eye opening,” he said. “It brought us face to face with the idea that individuals have the power to change things, but we’re also insignificant in the grand scheme of things.”

Hill said Lewis and Clark plans to begin providing annual opportunities like this to a wider range of students, beginning as early as next year.

“Cultural experiences give students an opportunity to question and examine many of the things they take for granted. That’s the core idea,” Hill said. “It’s about exposing them to new experiences, so they can examine and rethink the nature of the world they live in. They should think of themselves not only as citizens on a local level, but also a global one.”

"I went on this trip because I wanted to experience the culture and I knew it would be the chance of a lifetime. It was much more," said Jami McGee, a nursing student from Wood River. "I will never forget the kindness of the people and their appreciation of our presence in their seldom visited community. My favorite quote I put in my journal was 'I can't really explain, and can barely comprehend, the beauty of this country and its people. This is truly one of the world's best kept secrets.'"

L&C is a member of the Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) program. CCID is a consortium of 160 two-year colleges in the U.S. and 12 other countries, and is the pre-eminent two-year college organization in the United States working on all aspects of global vocational/professional education, and training overseas. Its mission is to take the community college model and share it internationally, while internationalizing it as well.

The Mustard Seed Peace Project (MSPP) is a grassroots non-profit organization with 510 (c) (3) status whose vision is to support youth in underprivileged countries. In Guatemala, the group has purchased a little more than 11 acres of land in the municipality of Playa Grande, located in the Ixcán region. On this land, with the help of the people of the village of Virginia, they have dug a well, built a park and several other structures, one of which will be used as a clinic for L&C's visiting medical team. Plans for Guatemala include an educational sponsorship program, a nutritional education program and several micro-economic projects for the women of the village of Virginia.

To view more photos from the trip, visit Lewis and Clark's Flickr album at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/lewisandclarkcc/sets/72157642006837195/>

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