

Orphanage outreach: Service learning in Dominican Republic

My service learning trip to Dominican Republic was an unforgettable experience. Prior to the trip I had very mixed emotions that ranged from nervous, excited, anxious and scared. With all the prepping, classes and trying to get the money together to go I was starting to second guess going. I'm glad I decided to follow through and go on the trip. Upon arrival in DR, as I stood in the immigration line, it hit me that I really was going to be serving in a different country for the next 5 days. Whole many of my fellow colleagues went home or visited other tourist areas and vacationed I went abroad with a program called orphanage outreach. I arrived on a Saturday but we didn't start going into the schools until Monday. Saturday and Sunday where relaxing days. Living in America where you have to constantly think about what's next what am I doing, it was hard to just enjoy sitting back and relaxing. As soon as Monday came I was anxious and ready to



go.

Living at the orphanage site allowed for a lot of time with the boys at the orphanage. The boys there were very friendly and sweet. Since I only know minimal Spanish there was a bit of a language barrier, but that did not stop them from trying to get to know you. It was very difficult trying to hold a conversation with the boys at first but once we connected with them we figured out how to communicate with each other. There was this one little adorable boy who came up to me on the first night eager to learn about me and teach me about him. The little boy name is Olbie. Olbie showed me around the entire orphanage site and explained life in DR to me. He was

my best friend for the week. It hurt so much when I had to leave him.



The kids and faculty members in the schools were very excited and welcomed us with open arms. They were very eager to learn. Schools in the Dominican Republic are taught in different sessions. There is a morning session from 8 to 12, then there is a break period where everyone relaxes, naps, or just spends time with friends and family. Then the next session is 1 to 5. We taught for about one hour, then it was time for recess. During recess, all the kids pulled you around, hung on your arms, and convinced you to play with them. It was really cool seeing the different games they play. During recess, I learned how to play duck, duck, goose in Spanish; it's pato pato gonzo. On the last day, it was hard to say goodbye. The kids made me pictures and cards, and the faculty at the school threw a big celebration for us. At the celebration, there was dancing, singing, food, and a bracelet ceremony where they called us up one by one and gave us these customized bracelets with our name and the DR colors on it. I will remember those kids in my heart forever.





On Wednesday we did a cultural day. During the cultural day we got to visit the local shops, explore different parts of Dr and go to the beautiful Monti Cristi beach. At the beach we hiked up a mountain to capture the uniqueness and beauty of DR from above.



Out in the field on the agriculture side it was very hard work. With the heat working against us we knew we were up for a challenge, but knowing how much it would help the little boys in the orphanage kept us going strong. We ran into some bumps in the road such as the irrigation pipes busting, sun burn, tired, body aches, critters and many other things. These bumps did not deter us as we kept our focus on the outcome and the goal we wanted to accomplish in order to help the orphanages in DR. In Dominican Republic I have learned a lot. The way of life there is so relaxed and calm. They don't deal with the everyday stress of what to do next and/or what will I

be in 2 years. The Dominicans live in the moment there only worry is what they are doing now. In DR I was a lot more relaxed and calm.



I truly am very thankful for the College of Agricultural Sciences and my family who helped me pay for this trip. It was a wonderful experience that really opened my eyes to a lot of new things.