

Casa Hogar de los Niños

Orphanage in Tijuana, Mexico

Summer 2010

Dear Friends

Summer is in full swing and the orphanage has seen many new faces come through. Over the past few months we have welcomed several new kids into our home and have hosted around 400 volunteers. These volunteers have done everything from building houses to improving the orphanage to working with other orphanages around Tijuana. We have

been blessed to see how Hogar de los Niños can function as a base camp for many different groups as they serve the greater community of Tijuana.

We hope your summer is awesome, thanks for reading and enjoy!

Tony Ralphs
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Pennsylvania State University

The Penn State Group made its annual return to Casa Hogar de Los Niños in March of this year. The group came with a little over twenty undergraduate students and was led by Debbie Bezilla (student liaison) and Father David Griffin, who have been leading the groups for almost ten years.

This year, the group split their time between the Hogar and another orphanage in Tijuana, La Gloria Infantil. The director of La Gloria was once a long-term volunteer at the Hogar. The Penn State students were able to offer their much-needed help at both facilities throughout the week. Half of the students were at the Hogar during the day and the other half at La Gloria. Construction projects included painting a nursery, recre-

ation rooms, and volunteer rooms at both locations. Of course, they were able to play and interact with children at both of the sites. The Penn State students returned back to the Hogar to share dinner with



Construction Projects

the children every night. Many of the dinners were spoken in partial Spanish, but there were always smiles from both the children and the students.

The Penn State group hosted several fun events for the children

of the Hogar during their stay. One night they challenged the kids to an ice cream eating contest, but not an ordinary contest. One person would be seated, with arms behind their back, while another person, blindfolded would feed them a bowl of ice cream. Three teams would participate at once and the first team to finish would



2010 Group Picture

win. There were many laughs and pictures snapped before the entire contest was done. On the final night of the week the group hosted a fiesta with funny games and a piñata for the kids. The week was a great success with all the help and happiness the students were able to bring.



Ice Cream Contest



Party Piñata

Casa Hogar de los Niños
Colonia Pedregal de Santa Julia
Tijuana, Mexico

www.hogardelosninos.com

Spring Break at the Hogar

As the spring rains started to taper off in Tijuana, the flights of volunteers began to come in. From the beginning of March to the middle of April, Casa Hogar de los Niños hosted almost four hundred volunteers. The groups included Penn State, Central Presbyterian Church Merced, Mercer Island Presbyterian Church (MIPC), University Presbyterian Church (UPC), and First Presbyterian Church Spokane.



Dinner Time

Penn State was the first to come, next was Merced. Scott Vance, pastor for Merced led a group of undergraduate students who helped to complete a kitchen in our new building and painted the exterior of the old orphanage, amongst other small projects. With the completion of these projects, the Hogar was prepared to host a collective three hundred volunteers simultaneously.

Within one week MIPC, UPC, and Spokane converged on the Hogar and had set up their groups in every available space. Groups were staying on every floor of the orphanage, in the old orphanage, and Casa de Tony. The groups brought their own



Sleeping in the Chapel

cooks to prepare three meals daily for the high school students and group leaders, who went out everyday to build houses. This meant that all three kitchens were busy all the time. Twenty-one houses were built in the span of one week. The houses were spread throughout a few neighborhoods of Tijuana including Pedregal and Cumbres.



Putting on the Finishing Touches

Many of the groups had to contend with worried parents because of the perceived threat of violence in Tijuana. But in actuality, while all of the volunteers were out in the community they were greeted only with thankfulness from the recipients of the



Painting

houses and the week passed without any incidents. The groups participated in many faith building exercises and reflections throughout the week when they came back to the Hogar in the evenings.

The vast majority of volunteers that came down to build houses were high school students. For some, this was their



Roof Construction

first experience in Tijuana while other's their second, third or fourth. In fact, some of the site leaders were former students that had returned to share it with younger members of their churches. The church leaders themselves have ten to twenty years of experience.

At the end of the week all the groups came together in a large gathering. It began as a spiritual celebration of all the hard work that had transpired during the week and to worship together. Members from all the churches participated to share in the celebration. After songs of praise had been sung and prayers shared, a fiesta began with a mariachi band. Everyone was able to dance the night away, relax, and get to better know the many people they had shared a wonderful week with.



Mariachi Band

St. Raymond's Parish & Irma

Charitable giving came down to the orphanage repeatedly this past February, April, and June. Jerry Aguero's supped-up, extra long bed, dual wheeled, Chevy truck brought donated food to be distributed to the community members of Colonia Pedregal de Santa Julia, the neighborhood around Hogar de los Niños Orphanage. Sitting in the front cab was Irma Landesfeind. She has been coming down for over thirty years to the Hogar with the primary focus of helping the orphanage, and then the surrounding community mainly through food distribution. She is a part of St. Raymond's Parish and has the amazing ability to motivate others around her passion for the poor of Tijuana.



Helping to Unload Donations

In years prior, long lines of neighborhood residents would stretch out early in the morning, before the doors to the Hogar had even opened. People knew they would be receiving a little bit more help putting food on the table that day. Irma would lead a caravan of cars and trucks down



Thankful Food Recipients

from the Los Angeles area, laden with food that she had collected and others had donated through St. Raymond's Parish. But the past few years of violence in Tijuana began to take its toll on volunteers willing to come down and the economic recession began to affect the availability of dona-



More Food Donations!

tions. Irma was forced to put her bi-monthly trips on hiatus until things began to come around. It was a 2 year wait, but finally she was able to make the trek again into Tijuana.

However, just because no one was making the physical trips to Tijuana over the past couple years did not mean that Irma's dedication stopped. She was still actively donating to the orphanage with St. Raymond's help as planned, just through other channels. When faced with circumstances that did not permit for plans to be carried out as normal, Irma still made the effort and kept in contact with the orphanage. This is just one great example of the hoops that some of our

most dedicated people have to go through to help our kids.

The children of the Hogar were quickly helping to unload Jerry's truck as it backed in near the old casa. Tables were set up so people could easily make their way in and select from the available donations. The crowd was smaller than in years past, but quickly grew as word spread. People carried out donations in all different types of boxes and bags and the children of the



Cécilia with Food

orphanage helped to pass out items. Children of the donation recipients even received candy treats on their way out the door. It did not take long before all of the food was gone. As the truck with Irma drove away, one could only be left to believe that a commitment to come again was reaffirmed, as the need in Tijuana for such giving and caring is still so evident and necessary.



Tables Full of Donated Food



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Volunteer: Kathy King

Over the past several months I have been the fortunate witness to hundreds of good willed people coming down to the Hogar for the sole purpose of volunteering. They come to help better the world in some small way, and to the best of their abilities. Amongst living and volunteering with them, I am often asked the same questions as to how I found the Hogar, why I came and what my normal day entails. As the weeks passed and became months and months almost a year some of those reasons have influenced why I decided to stay and make Tijuana and San Diego a more permanent part of my life.

I come from a small town in Wisconsin and after completion of my bachelor's degree I made my way out to New York City. I worked there for several years as a paralegal in a medium sized law firm. The excitement and prestige of some of the things I did just weren't fulfilling me. The city was grinding me down and making me a person that I didn't want to be. I felt I was too young to be that unhappy and I needed a change. I needed fulfillment in something worthwhile, not making other people money. I spent several months looking for an opportunity to volunteer abroad and came across the website for Casa Hogar de Los Niños. I began corresponding with Tony and soon made plans to come down. In October, I quit my job and decided I would

come down for two months then go back to NYC refreshed and ready to look for a new job. But things changed quickly.



Kathy & Hilda

After a few weeks here, personal events transpired that left me wondering whether returning to NYC was the best option for me. Tony, another volunteer Elise, and I made a trip to Arizona in November to meet a friend of Tony's, Father Henri, at a monastery. In that reflective place and talking with Tony in a sixteen-hour car ride, I decided to take a chance and I would continue to stay in Tijuana and help create a new volunteer program. I began responding to inquiries about volunteer opportunities and began to make the fifth floor available to those staying. We were able to host short term and long term volunteers. It was a "learn as we went" process and it gave many people opportunities to volunteer and change their own lives.

On a daily basis though, my schedule and activities depended on the children. I would walk to school and help with homework. I was limited in the age levels I could help because I speak limited Spanish. But I would try nonethe-

less, forge ahead and hope that I was helping. Because of the language barrier, there were many frustrating moments but what I held onto were the bright moments, the moments when I felt that what I was doing was important.

I have had many personally magnificent moments here. Sometimes, though, the subtleties of those moments are difficult to express to others and even put into words. My relationships with the children are an intricate part of why I stayed and as anyone knows, those are the feelings that are special within one's self. Building houses has been a great way to also participate in the community and has led to me volunteering with another nonprofit in Tijuana, called Corazon. But another of the greatest joys that I have experienced down here has been the kindness of everyone. Anyone who comes down here does so to help and be of service. No one comes with agendas and selfishness. If they do and also come with some fear or prejudices it is all but erased when the reality of Tijuana and the poverty is witnessed. The collective goodwill of everyone who works and lives at the Hogar or comes down to volunteer has carried me through some difficult times. Surrounded by such nice people I have decided to begin creating a life in San Diego. I feel as though I have gone through a "quarter-life crisis" and couldn't have landed in a better place to set my life in a direction more valuable to the world.



Kathy, Cynthia, & the Pedregal Skyline



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