

## **International Development Project: Changing more lives, yet again**

By Olivia Dumas

Almost two months have gone by since we, a group of eleven graduates, were welcomed back to Westwood Senior high school after sixteen days of volunteering in the small rural community of Planes de Hicaque, in Northern Honduras. Our goal was to provide support and some basic necessities to the village. We are proud to say that we helped out this village more than we could have imagined.

As we were immersed directly in their culture and lived with the local families, we started to face some challenges. The lack of contact back home and the language barrier was mentally and emotionally exhausting for us. However, we soon adapted to the simpler living conditions and enriched our knowledge of this developing country.

I, along with ten other secondary V students, worked for several long days, alongside the local people on a practical construction project. Due to the involvement of the student body of Westwood and the community, we were able to supply the school, which was called Jose Cecilia del Valle, in the village with proper functioning facilities, that they were desperately in need of. We were so determined and driven, that we were left with a lot more time to bring more necessities to the community. The local teachers and students had always desired to have their classroom and exterior of the school painted green, so the Westwood students did not hesitate to take on the task.



Jared Whitelaw laying down cement to finalize the bathroom.

It was difficult for Canadian students to fathom the lack of services in the community. The shocking amount of trash in the village pushed us towards completing a third project. We collected plastic bottles from a nearby dumpster and used them to build a dozen garbage cans out of recyclable materials to improve the village's waste system. After only a few days there, we could see the impact we were having on the people's lives. The children, teachers, parents and locals were so pleased and happy with our presence. We could not help but feel more inclined to keep on giving.

The last project consisted of building a playground and tire swings for the kids at the school. As we completed the play area and brought out toys, soccer balls and school supplies for the little ones, a feeling of pure love rushed through us. The faces of these humble people lit up the room. We could not have made such an impact if it was not for the support from our school, community and school board and for that we are so very grateful.

From the villagers, we learned that happiness has nothing to do with material possessions. The families there lacked so many things, yet gave us all that they had. The generosity from this village was so amazing. Whether it be giving up their beds for us, giving us most of their food or walking us everywhere to ensure our security, the families did it all. The amount of kindness, happiness and humbleness resonating from the Hondurans' hearts was unbelievable.



Three girls playing on the newly constructed playground made out of tires.

Through all the challenges, sweat and tears, none of us regretted our experience there. It was so incredibly shocking how strong of a bond we made with our host families. They took care of us and loved us so much during our stay, both us and our host families could not help but feel painfully sad as we were saying our final goodbyes. Tears rushing down their faces and ours, a memory so empowering was left on our lives.

There are no words to explain how grateful the village was for the impact that we had on their lives. As adolescents, we are proud to say that we really did change the lives of an entire community. We put in the time and the effort to develop the skills needed to turn our ambitious goal into a practical reality.

Not only did we provide the village with facilities and other necessities, but more importantly, we provided ourselves with a whole different point of view on life. We signed up for this project thinking we would be helping out a community. We came back as eleven proud and changed students. As cheesy as it sounds, we discovered the definition of true happiness and learnt that no matter what you are missing, there is always a way you can help another out. Never will the village forget the experience and happiness we kids brought to their lives. And neither will we.

And that is what made this experience so incredibly fulfilling.

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