Program Background

GlobeMed is a Chicago-based company founded on the concept of grassroots community work, in which chapters at different universities partner with health-oriented companies in developing countries. We believe that health is a human right and the best way to improve health equity in a community is to work with the people who live there and understand the needs of the community best. Our GlobeMed chapter at Georgetown University works under this model and has partnered with the Primeros Pasos Clinic for over five years.

What We Do

Throughout the academic year, our club fundraises for the clinic through various projects and advocates for important global health issues on campus and in Washington, D.C. Every summer 2-4 students are sent through the GROW (GrassRoots On-site Work) Internship program to work at the clinic in person. This internship is used as a time of “mutual learning” and partnership strengthening.¹

About Primeros Pasos

The clinic, located in the Palajunoj Valley, was originally founded in 2002 as a place where children in the community could receive free medical care in local schools. It has since then expanded to provide free or affordable medical and dental care and health education, including laboratory services and nutritional recuperation. This January, it launched a new outreach program, which encompasses nutrition and education in the valley, specifically geared to target malnutrition.

The Palajunoj Valley

Despite being only 10 minutes outside Quetzaltenango, the second largest city in Guatemala, the Valley varies drastically in development and resources. People in the largely indigenous population face many life-threatening health challenges, such as lack of access to potable water, insufficient food and dietary education, substance abuse, and poor sanitary education. The effects of these disparities are evident in high rates of malnutrition, stunting, low body weight, infections and diseases.

Notable Moments

This was the first day of our internship at Primeros Pasos. We met the doctors and all of the staff that make the clinic possible. Then, we met with the volunteer coordinator to find out how we could best help the clinic and how our work would improve our long-term partnership.

Learning from Monica Pérez, the clinic’s nutrition specialist about the sanitation and nutrition issues most prevalent in the Palajunoj Valley before heading out to teach the information in school classrooms.

Future Directions

GlobeMed at Georgetown will continue to partner with the outreach program at Primeros Pasos for the following years. We will be supporting all of their initiatives and continuing to fundraise and advocate for the clinic from abroad.

References


Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the staff of Primeros Pasos for the opportunity to work at such an amazing organization and learn about grassroots health advocacy. We would also like to thank our fellow interns we had the pleasure of working alongside for 6 weeks.

Results

We spent a total of six weeks working with the clinic in the Palajunoj Valley and living with a host family in Quetzaltenango. Our work was two-fold: volunteering with the outreach team and kick-starting the new development program. In outreach, we went into different communities in the Valley, namely Bella Vista, Las Majadas, Tierra Colorada Alta, and Tierra Colorada Baja, once or twice a week. First, we weighed and measured children in the local schools to calculate a z-score and determine the amount of malnutrition in the area. These studies were followed by conducting small educational sessions called charlas, in which we taught classes to students and parents about attainable nutrition and sanitation techniques. As development interns, we spent time writing and editing quarterly and annual reports for the clinic as far back as 2012; these reports are essential to continuing to get funding to keep the clinic running. We were also in charge of several large projects, such as our Fourth of July BBQ fundraiser, which surpassed our goal by 2000 Quetzales. Toward the end of our trip, we launched our “Water for Wellbeing” campaign, teaming up with Ecofiltro to provide two-year water filters to families in the Valley at an affordable price, while Ecofiltro donated filters to every school in the four communities the clinic serves, one of which has no access to clean drinking water.

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