

THE OFFICIAL

NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Costa Rica 



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PROJECT UPDATE

Free English for All: Teaching Volunteers Offer English Language Camp

School children in Heredia welcome the two-week vacation in mid-July, and most enjoy it by playing football in a park or video games at home. However, Andres Mendoza, head of English for the Ministry of Education in Heredia had a different idea on how the local youth could spend their holidays: with English classes. Teaming up with Projects Abroad teaching volunteers, the Ministry of Education made free English classes available during the break for students and adults of all ages and levels.



“The main reason for running this school is that unfortunately in Costa Rica, and specifically in Heredia, there are problems with public education, especially in learning English,” states Mendoza. “And we noticed that after six years of reviewing English exams in schools, it’s difficult for the children to even say a phrase or sentence in English.”

“I’ve taken English classes before,” states parent and student Sandra Castro. “And I’ve learned more in two weeks than I’ve learned in years of classes.”



The volunteers are the key to the students’ success. Often, it’s the volunteers’ lack of fluency in Spanish that creates an opportunity for mutual learning. “They laugh at us, and we laugh at them,” says parent and student Emelinda Viquez. “It’s an environment where we can talk freely without fear of messing up.”

“It’s like an immersion for the students because most volunteers don’t speak very much Spanish, so the children are forced to learn English--they can’t ask questions in Spanish,” states Mendoza.

“The volunteers are so young, and they have so much patience. We ask repeatedly, and they answer each time,” says Viquez.

“The school has been a huge success,” states Mendoza. “Honestly, this has been a new experience and one that I want to see us continue as long as Projects Abroad is here. We don’t want to have it only during vacations; we hope to make it a part of the regular curriculum.”

GROUP TRIPS

St. Anne's Girls' School at Centro Infantil: Little People

At our care project in Costa Rica, most volunteers find themselves working at a day care center sponsored by the IMAS (Instituto Mixto por Ayuda Social), which has the goal of providing a safe place for working mothers to leave their children during the day. Unfortunately, most of these care centers are under-staffed and survive on a minimal budget. However, this means that volunteers have the opportunity to take on a lot of responsibility and make a significant impact in the lives of the children. This July, science teacher Joanne Kitching lead a group of 5 students from St. Anne's Girls' School to do care work at Little People day care center in Heredia.

"Working here, you see a lot of children and not much staff. Without the extra people volunteering here, the children wouldn't get as much attention, and it's much harder work for the people who do work here," states Kitching.

"When we came on the first day, there were 30 children and 3 teachers, so we were shocked at how much work was put on them and how much attention the children needed," says Leah Blake, a sixth form student.

"When you realize that many of these children are usually here 12 hours a day because their parents are working to make ends meet, it really is quite touching," says another student, Norma Molla.

"It makes you think about what you have in life and what others do not have. It makes you think about material things, and how you don't need them. You see them and all they want to do is give you a hug for some love and attention," says Kitching. "I definitely recommend all the students to do something like this."

Following their week at Little People, the St. Anne's care group joined from their class in Barra Honda National Park to carry out conservation work. "It makes me feel good that we're giving time to help other people, and it makes me very proud of the girls who came here. It's quite a scary thing to come to another country, and they don't speak very good Spanish, so they're trying to learn the language as well. It makes me proud of them representing the school."



GROUP TRIPS

Oakham School Health Campaign in Nueva Cinchona

In terms of natural beauty, Costa Rica has it all. From mountains and beaches to rainforests and volcanoes; one witnesses first-hand the shift in atmosphere and terrain that is the result of centuries of unrest beneath the earth's surface. The earthquake that destroyed the pueblo of Cinchona in early 2009 serves as a modern-day testament to this. Five and a half years after the quake, the town has been rebuilt under the name Nueva Cinchona, housing around 90 families, most of them former residents of the original pueblo. Oakham School, as part of their culture of service and desire for practical application, has taken the opportunity to spend a week in Nueva Cinchona embarking on a health campaign to help bring awareness and offer basic exams to the town's residents. Dr. Andrew Nicoll, biology teacher at Oakham School, lead the group of ten students to Costa Rica with the aim of carrying out a health campaign to gain practical experience in the field of medicine. "The challenge is to do things in another culture, in another language," he states.

The group, comprised primarily of aspiring medical students, is conducting nutrition lectures and fitness classes, as well as general medical evaluations including BMI observation, blood sugar testing, and blood pressure readings. While this information and these evaluations may seem basic, they are a necessary service to which many in rural pueblos such as Nueva Cinchona simply do not have access. "I think there should be more emphasis on healthy eating," states student, Patrick Martin. "The average BMI that we've been seeing is way above normal, and most of this can be attributed to the diet, which when combined with a sedentary lifestyle can be a big problem." "More communication and prevention can help, as well as giving specifics," claims student Alexa Demetri. "it's good to be able to recommend different things to people, exactly what they can do to get better."

Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles that the group has had to face has been the language barrier between the students and the community. Daily Spanish classes have helped, but communication still remains a challenge. "It's nice to be able to communicate with a person in their own language instead of expecting them to speak yours," states Demetri.

"I've gotten better at working my way around the direct problem of language," Martin adds. "In terms of applying for medical school, this has given me experience that will make me stand out from the rest."



A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



Hello everyone and greetings from Heredia!

July has been an exciting month for us here in Costa Rica. We've seen our national football team make history by progressing to the World Cup quarter finals, and on the 25 of July, we celebrated the anexation of Guanacaste province where our conservation project is located.

As summer peaks in the northern hemisphere, so does the amount of volunteers that we welcome to our projects here in Costa Rica. This July, we're pleased to have hosted groups from St. Anne's Girls' School in Northern London and Oakham School from Rutland England. Additionally, this month we welcome our 2-Week High School Special volunteers participating in care and conservation projects in Heredia and Barra Honda National Park.

I'd like to encourage all of you to follow us on instagram @projectsabroadcostarica, and join Projects Abroad Costa Rica: The Official Group on facebook. We post new photos and links daily showing some of the great work that volunteers are doing as well as goings-on around the country. Also, look for us on Pinterest!

Finally, I'd like to invite you to send in stories about your current or former experience to be published in up-coming newsletters. You can email your stories (don't forget photos!) to leesteenbergen@projects-abroad.org.



Thanks,

Lee Steenbergen
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