
COSTA RICA – THE YOUTH LEADER’S EVALUATION

In July, 27 teenagers and leaders from our Churches left for San Jose, Costa Rica to work with young children in a local orphanage. The journey, for us involved however, commenced a long time before the summer, with twelve months worth of teambuilding, fundraising and discipleship training groups.

The trip itself consisted of six days manual labour and a week of children’s ministry work. It was during week one that the team completed the construction side of the trip, whilst week two was spent working with the children in the three day care centres in San Jose, participating in crafts, sports, games, puppet shows and songs. It was also during this week that we had the opportunity to visit one of the thirteen local shantytowns, called ‘Los Guido’s’. This proved to be a very emotional day for the whole team, truly highlighting some of the reasons why missionary work is so vital in poor countries.



Since our return, the team have met on several occasions to discuss different aspects of the trip and how it has impacted their lives personally. It has been wonderful to see so many of them appreciate that although the trip itself was a life changing experience, that many of them had already begun their spiritual transformation throughout the months of preparation beforehand. It was during this process the foundations were laid, allowing the young people to discuss their personal spiritual journeys with their peers and individual leaders in a safe, relaxed environment. By the time we left for Costa Rica, the young people were prepared for the changes that may occur in their lives.

“How does one become a butterfly?” she asked. “You must want to fly so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar.” (Trina Paulus)

The discipleship training was really a combination of three factors, and it was imperative that all these were present to truly achieve success and spiritual growth for the youth. These important features were a) Gods Word, which would help to guide the young people in all areas of their lives, b) Our walk as leaders, as the growth of these young disciples would inevitably imitate our own



strengths and weaknesses, and c) Our shared life – for it is the rapport - that delicate relationship between the students and their leaders, the sharing of one’s own personal experiences, the investment in time and the true giving of oneself, that would provide the impetus for real growth.

We, as leaders, were placed in a very privileged relationship with some of God's young disciples. Being with the youth inspired us all and made everyone so much more passionate about this mission opportunity, as we witnessed the changes in their lives. However, it was always important for us all as leaders to point the young people towards Christ and continue in the relationship for the benefit of the students, rather than for the things we may get out of it ourselves.

For me personally, the hardest part of the journey has been maintaining the goal that the students would become independent of me, and our relationship, as they grow more dependent on God. This is so much harder than I ever expected, as I feel so attached to them all, but I have to keep reminding myself that they were never mine, they belong to God and I have just been entrusted with them for a season. It is important that the seasons change otherwise life would not continue in the way God intended.

Now that we have returned to some sort of "normality" and "routine", I can truly evaluate the mission trip, establishing the areas that were particularly successful and those that required additional work. Before we started the discipleship programme I had put in place the 'GAMES' grid as an evaluation tool. My next step is to utilise this framework to evaluate all the young people who went to Costa Rica on an individual, confidential basis. However, I feel that it is important to share an evaluation of the group as a whole, because as the Churches involved, we are all responsible for ensuring the discipleship of our future generations.

G:ROWTH - Are the young people growing in their faith in Jesus? Are they growing in areas of obedience?

The whole group have shown incredible growth both practically and spiritually. For majority of the young people involved, there has been a substantial increase in confidence, enabling the students to fervently discuss their beliefs, any doubts they may have and their love for Christ, without fear of embarrassment or disapproval from their peers.

The students have continually shown their desire to be obedient, through their participation in this trip and the opening of themselves mentally, emotionally and spiritually to the rest of the group.



Further to this, since our return, the young people have all demonstrated high levels of attendance in a weekly home devotional group.

They have also given testimonies of their personal journeys, and compiled and spoken at various presentations on the mission trip for members of the Churches involved and the local community. One member of the team has also been baptised since our return, stating the trip as being a pivotal, defining moment in her relationship with Christ.

A:CCOUNTABILITY - Do the students hold each other accountable to put what they are learning, and their faith into practice?

Throughout the trip there were many occasions where the young people were called to work and minister to the children at Roblealto on their own. It was evident that amid their small groups, the young people maintained high standards of accountability, continually encouraging other students who may have found things difficult, whilst ensuring that any lapses in behaviour or language were totally intolerable.

The young people actively participated in all areas of ministry, including daily devotionals, prayers, and the Spanish bible studies and fellowshipping with the children and families at the Bible Home.

M:INISTRY - Are the young people ministering outside of the group?

Since our return the young people have continued to demonstrate a willingness to participate in local community events, Church services and prayer walks. There have been several opportunities for members of the group to talk openly of their experience in Costa Rica and give their individual testimonies via presentations, feedback evenings, youth led Church services, circuit meetings and the local newspaper.

Whilst there has been a significant growth in confidence for all team members, it is still apparent that a few members of the team do not feel totally at ease with speaking publicly. Regardless of this fact, they have all participated, appreciating that this is another part of their journey and growth as a young Christian.

E:QUIPPING - Are the young people equipped to be strong in a non-Christian world?'



The young people are going through a process of metamorphosis, evolving from 'being at Church' to 'becoming Church'. This is a long process, and the students all have different growth rates in this area. However, on a whole, it is now evident that all of the youth are open to discovering more about

Christ, and they are active in their faiths.

With the entire team now being involved in a home devotional group, it is clear that the journey that commenced twelve months ago has impacted them all enormously, and whenever they do feel the struggles of being 'in the world but not of the world', they are now able to discuss this amongst their fellow team members and turn to God's Word for answers and comfort.

S:UPPORT - Are the young people caring for each other?

The young people have shown nothing but utter support, love and compassion for each other throughout the mission trip. The bond between the team members has developed immensely; this has probably been the most fundamental and noticeable change throughout the whole experience.

Initially there were a few concerns voiced by the young people about how they would all function together, coming from different social backgrounds, family environments and spiritual maturity levels. Throughout the pre-trip teambuilding activities, the young people worked hard to get to know each other and find ways they would be able to tolerate a combination of different personalities. In Costa Rica, the students became friends. A true, deepening friendship spread throughout the group, as they became entwined in this life changing experience that they will always share together.

The group constantly supported each other mentally and emotionally, especially during the difficult times on the trip. After the team had visited the local shantytown, many students were shaken and shocked by what they had witnessed, and needing an outlet for their feelings, they took it upon themselves to discuss this in small groups, sharing their vulnerable raw emotions and even praying for each other. This was, without a doubt, the most significant and awe-inspiring event of the trip in regards to spiritual growth within the group.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus has left us all with the job of raising disciples who can in turn go out into the world and impact others, changing one life at a time. It would probably be appropriate here for me to say how the trip has helped the young people on their individual journeys, and whilst this is the case, I would prefer to say the following:

I have thoroughly enjoyed every aspect of engaging the young people in all the teambuilding activities, discipleship programme, and the mission trip itself. This shared experience has definitely blessed me through witnessing the changes in the student's lives, and in regards to impacting one life at a time, I think the biggest impact was on me.

Many blessings,

Sara