

BYU Students return from 'service abroad'

NewsNet Staff Writer - 14 Jun 2000

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By Eliza Moody

eliza@newsroom.byu.edu

Enter to learn, go forth to serve.

Some BYU students are taking the BYU motto seriously and serving others in Latin America.

They are an enthusiastic bunch, and eight of them came back June 13 from Latin America where they spent six to eight weeks providing humanitarian services.

"I was involved in distributing aid in a refugee camp," said Robin Day, 23, a senior from Twin Falls, majoring in business management. "It just opened up my eyes. I loved it."

Many BYU students are participating in the Help Eliminate Poverty International (HELP International) program, a program that provides internship and service opportunities abroad.

This summer, BYU has over 100 student participants in El Salvador, Venezuela, Peru, and Honduras.

"This is service abroad -- that's how I'd put it," said Brandon Wood, 24, a senior from Orem, majoring in business management.

"It's an educational opportunity that allows you to provide real service for real people," he said.

HELP International is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing service.

"Even though I was serving, I was being served," Day said.

"One of the most memorable moments of the trip was when a little boy about four years old gave me one of the cookies we had just given him," Day said.

"He was the one in the need, yet he was willing to offer everything he had to me. It was just a heart-warming moment."

Warner Woodworth, a professor of organizational leadership and strategy, began the program in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch ravished the already impoverished country in October 1998.

"What we're really trying to do," Woodworth said, "is create a whole generation of social

entrepreneurs who can combine their college education with gospel values to build a new world."

The first volunteers went out in April 1999. Already, the program has created 47 new village banks, rendered over 4,300 humanitarian service hours, and is expanding through out Latin America.

"It has been the most rewarding thing I've done in my life," said Jennifer Boehme, 23, the director of HELP International.

"We've put together a program that can make people's lives better."

HELP International started by providing community services in Honduras.

"We taught Spanish literacy, we worked in refugee camps and helped people build homes," Boehme said, "We did a little bit of everything."

Later, the organization expanded to include a proactive plan for economic redevelopment.

At the heart of the economic redevelopment plan is microcredit banking. The microcredit banking concept centers on small loans given to those who do not qualify for traditional loans.

The program allows those with little capital, the "poorest of the poor," to elevate themselves above the poverty line by using the loan to create or expand their business.

"This is what is unique about our program," Boehme said, "we are not just giving a loan, we are creating a vision."

It is a focus on education and what you can do with the right tools and skills, she said.

The microcredit concept was created in the early 1970's when economist Muhammed Yunus, teaching at a university in Bangladesh, noticed the poverty surrounding him, and the difficulty the poor faced in overcoming these circumstances.

Based on these realizations, Yunus founded the Grameen Bank to provide credit for those attempting to overcome the circle of poverty.

"Microcredit is a hand-up instead of a hand-out," Woodworth said. "It helps people to help themselves without taking away their dignity or their will to work."

In 1998, a research team interviewed over 400 loan recipients to assess the impact of microcredit.

"The results showed microcredit had a tremendous impact with these families," said Todd M. Manwaring, a member of the research team and executive director of humanitarian link, a sponsor for HELP International.

"Within a matter of months, these families had better access to medicine, schooling and were able

to eat better," he said.

Earlier this year, Woodworth was the recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

The award included a stipend that Woodworth donated to HELP International.

Recently, Woodworth was also named the first-ever Lowell Bennion Humanitarian Award recipient. He was presented with the Circle of Honor Award in 1999, the ASQ Distinguished Lecturer Award in 1998 and the BYU Humanitarian Award in 1997.