

FUERZA HONDURAS

Newsletter - August 2017

In March of 2017, a team of five Dartmouth students led by a Dartmouth alumna spent ten days in El Rosario, Honduras to run the ninth annual “La Fuerza para el Futuro” (“The Force for the Future”) program. Referred to simply as “Fuerza” by the Dartmouth leaders and teenage participants, the program is a weeklong leadership camp that empowers Honduran teenagers to serve as advocates for their community. This year, we had a record number of participants, with 80 Fuerza students from three different communities in the region. The program featured a special community project, which was planned in collaboration with researchers from the Norris Cotton Cancer Center. Many of the activities and lessons were centered on the safe usage of agricultural chemicals, which was relevant due to the key role of agriculture in the local economy. We also introduced a new program called “Fuerza Arriba” which gave veteran Fuerza students the opportunity to become “teachers in training” and lead Fuerza workshops.



Fuerza Arriba with their students in Los Planes

This year's team of Dartmouth students brought a diverse array of cultural and academic backgrounds with extensive international experience. Together they composed a strong leadership team that was able to effectively navigate the complexities of the cross-cultural Fuerza program. Although students have numerous opportunities to volunteer abroad while at Dartmouth, the Fuerza program stands out to them as a particularly unique opportunity for international service because of the strong and long-standing ties that ACTS Honduras has in the region. ACTS is dedicated to a model of sustainable community development, which plays a large role in the continued success of the Fuerza program in empowering young leaders. For this reason, many Dartmouth students on our team return to El Rosario year after year to continue building long lasting relationships with the Fuerza students.



Dartmouth students work hard year-round to plan the annual Fuerza program. Their commitment brings them back to El Rosario year after year.



Students pose after the traditional Fuerza Graduation Ceremony

Agricultural Chemical Education and Leadership Curriculum

Forty percent of the Honduran population is employed in the agricultural sector with the vast majority of the farmers living in rural communities like El Rosario. In El Rosario and the surrounding region, nearly all males are farmers who regularly work with agricultural chemicals. They wear little to no personal protective equipment and have not been taught basic safety procedures for mixing and spraying chemicals. While the men are directly exposed to the chemicals, the dangers extend to all members of the family. The chemicals are stored in homes where playing children can mistakenly access chemicals. Men also do not use shower facilities before returning home. Anyone washing the contaminated clothes or residing in the same home is at risk.



Ronis, a farmer in El Rosario



Henry presents safe practices for chemical use to a farmer

The agricultural chemical safety component of the Fuerza curriculum raised awareness of these risks. Curriculum activities served the dual purpose of educating the local people about this public health issue and allowing the students to think creatively and problem solve. Encouraging creativity is especially crucial, as the traditional Honduran education system does not lend much opportunity for creativity in the classroom. Students were divided into smaller groups by age with each group led by a pair of Fuerza leaders. Fuerza students first learned how to properly use and store agricultural chemicals. This included practices such as wearing personal protective equipment on the face, hands, arms and legs, spraying from upwind, storing chemicals outside

the home and showering / washing clothes before returning home. They then communicated these practices to their community using skits and posters. At the end of the week, they presented to an attentive audience of 55 farmers. While the Fuerza is focused on educating members of their communities to greatly reduce health risks, the Norris Cotton Cancer Center is constructing a community shower and chemical storage facility and will be studying any resulting health changes.

In creating these skits, students had many opportunities to lead in a team setting. In one group, an older student stepped up as the leader when she delegated portions of the project to smaller subgroups so they could work more effectively. One of these subgroups decided to show how to properly wash contaminated clothing while another demonstrated how to wear personal protective equipment and spray the chemicals from upwind to limit exposure. Although initially a challenge, the students were able to first nail down the main points they wished to communicate and then use their creativity in constructing



Students use flour to demonstrate spread of chemicals

scenes and incorporating props to deliver their message. When they finally got up to perform in front of a large group of adult farmers dressed up with fake spray backpacks and bandanas over their faces, they achieved their goal of teaching clear lessons in an entertaining and fun way. An especially memorable part of the skits was a scene where students used flour to show the way that chemicals spread during human-to-human contact. With students becoming covered in flour from head to toe, it was a fun but powerful way to help their audience understand the dangers of these chemicals.



Abrahán performs in a skit modeling safe spraying techniques

Additional Group Curriculum

The Dartmouth students that worked as Fuerza leaders split off into pairs. Each pair was in charge of writing and implementing their own leadership curriculum with their respective groups of students.

Jamie '20 and Benny '19 worked with the younger Fuerza students to foster leadership qualities and community oriented thinking. Some practical leadership skills that were taught included poster-making and presentation skills. Incorporating characters like "Señor Asco" ("Mr. Dirty") in their daily lessons, the students worked to make informative and clear signs

with educational messages about agricultural chemicals. They also led group discussions about the importance of being a strong leader and how to contribute to positive change in their communities, even and especially as young people.

Michael '19 and Lucía '19 worked with the older Fuerza students. The group held a mock presidential election during which they discussed community issues and developed potential solutions. Students practiced oral communication skills by giving speeches to peers about how they would be the most effective agent for change as president. Michael and Lucía also encouraged their students to reflect on their personal growth each day with structured journaling time.



Fuerza students create educational public health posters



Fuerza students perform the song "Caraluna" at graduation

As is tradition, all of the Fuerza participants performed a song and dance at graduation. The Dartmouth students taught the lyrics of the song to students in small groups. By the end of the week, the students rehearsed the entire song and dance together as an entire camp. It was remarkable how well the song and dance came together and it was truly wonderful to see how much pride the students took in their performance in front of friends and family at graduation. It was clear that they had realized the power of teamwork and collaboration in working to create something bigger than themselves.

Construction

This year, the Fuerza students worked on three main construction projects: painting the local education center, painting the regional medical clinic and building benches for central community gathering areas. Through collaborative effort and teamwork, the students completed these extensive painting projects. Construction is an integral part of the Fuerza program each year. In addition to the obvious benefit to the community that comes with any type of hands-on improvement work, the construction has a tremendous impact on the growth of the students. By stimulating an ethic of volunteerism, these projects allow the students to feel a sense of pride and ownership over their community.



Fuerza Arriba



One of the most exciting parts of the trip was launching the Fuerza Arriba program with the veteran Fuerza students. The mission of the Fuerza Arriba is to train the most promising Fuerza graduates as future leaders of the program. Prior to the official start of the Fuerza program, Juliana '13 worked with the eleven "leaders in training" to plan their own leadership curriculum. The Fuerza Arriba used this opportunity to demonstrate the leadership skills they had developed over the past 7 - 9 years.

Fuerza Arriba leaders engage their students in leadership building activities

They took the initiative to organize their own supplemental planning meetings and met with the nurse at the clinic to get input and materials as they planned a component of their curriculum centered on public health and STI prevention. Once the planning was completed, the Fuerza Arriba traveled to three remote communities to teach young people who, until now, had lived too far away to participate in the regular Fuerza program. In all, they taught over 70 new participants and walked them through leadership development and reflection exercises. The Fuerza Arriba was a huge success for both the "leaders in training" and their new students. We are all looking forward to the continuation of this program.



Fuerza Arriba works with students on reflection exercises

Looking Forward

Our team is working hard this summer to plan the next year of the Fuerza program. As the community surrounding El Rosario develops, so too must the Fuerza. With the success of a recent ACTS project in partnership with The Children's Initiative, most Fuerza students are now able to attend high school classes full time through age 17. To accommodate their school schedules, we will now hold the Fuerza program every December beginning in 2017. Additionally, we have decided to continue our partnership with the Norris Cotton Cancer Center and will be working with Fuerza students this December to expand on the agricultural chemical education we provided in March.



Our entire team would like to express our utmost gratitude for your generous support of our program. Together, we have reached our collective goal of empowering future leaders in Honduras. Thank you, and we look forward to sharing more with you in the future.

Warmly,

The Fuerza Honduras Team

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