

# FUERZA HONDURAS

Newsletter - January 2021



We're excited to share with you an update from our 2020 Fuerza program! This past year has been very challenging for our students and close friends in Honduras. In addition to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the country also suffered substantial destruction from Hurrricanes Eta (Category 4) and Iota (Category 5) which hit just two weeks apart in November. The country's recovery will be long but the Fuerza students have given us hope that the young people in Honduras are determined to work hard to help their country recover.

Although the Dartmouth group was not able to travel to Honduras in-person this year, the program continued on and was as successful as ever. As you may remember from previous newsletters, we have a designated group of students within the program called "Fuerza Arriba." Many of these older students began participating in the Fuerza program when they were just 12 years old. A few years ago, we decided to establish this more advanced cohort so that our most engaged students would be able to get more hands-on leadership experience by beginning to

teach the younger Fuerza students and autonomously lead community projects throughout the year. The past year has shown us how much these students have grown as self-directed leaders, in particular when they prepared their community to take safety precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, for example, the group created checkpoints at all roads into el Rosario to ensure anyone entering was wearing a mask and aware of social distancing guidelines.

The establishment of the Fuerza Arriba cohort laid the groundwork for the 2020 program. Admittedly, we were all quite skeptical as to whether we could pull off a virtual program (made possible by the recent addition of the village's first wifi network). But the Dartmouth group spent many months together over Zoom throughout the fall, preparing curriculum content and planning out the technical logistics of the program. We were thrilled to find that the Fuerza Arriba were equally committed.

Over the course of a weekend in December, we spent 10 hours on Zoom with the Arriba students discussing curriculum, supply budgets, activities, and schedules. The following week the Arriba students led the program themselves, teaching more than 25 students and managing the on-the-ground logistics needed to make the program



run smoothly. The group checked in with us over Zoom to recap each day and prepared for the next. As is tradition, the week culminated with a graduation ceremony when we saw, over video, how much work the students had accomplished.

It was disappointing to not be able to travel to El Rosario this year. But this difficult year opened up the opportunity for the Arriba to take the success of the Fuerza program into their own hands, and they seized it! We hope you read on to learn more about this year's Fuerza program.





## Fuerza Curriculum

We designed this year's curriculum to further develop last year's topics and engage the students with new material, while also empowering the students to feel they have the ability to make change in their communities.

This year, we presented three overarching topics: COVID-19 and dengue; Sexual Education and Consent; and nutrition, exercise, and mental health. The students all worked together on a construction project to finish off the week. The curriculum was designed to be interactive and fun for all types of learners. We incorporated games, posters, presentations, and trivia. It was sad not to participate with them in person for these activities, but we can imagine that there was no shortage of laughter.





One of the most important aspects of the Fuerza program is the opportunity for the students to have an impact on their own community. We encourage them to share the information they have learned throughout the week by having students bring home pamphlets they have created, prompting and practicing discussions to have with their families, and most importantly creating final presentations to share with the whole community. The students worked hard this year to create fun, informative skits, posters and presentations to share with El Rosario. It is so rewarding for all of us to see the culmination of the work they have put in and the knowledge that they have gained.

### **COVID-19 & dengue fever**

This year we incorporated lessons on COVID-19 and dengue, as both of these diseases have both a global impact and a direct impact on the community of El Rosario. In the lessons they taught, the Fuerza Arriba stressed the importance of taking precautions for personal safety as well as for community health, while making the differences between the two clear.

We broke the COVID curriculum into three sections: an overview, guidelines for quarantining, and everyday precautions.

The overview explained COVID-19, busted myths, presented statistics, and talked about forms of transmission, variation in symptoms, complications, and immunity. The quarantine section provided information on the designated spaces where community members would quarantine if infected or exposed to the virus. The Fuerza Arriba taught about the physical distancing of beds, hand washing, and personal hygiene, disinfecting contaminated surfaces, and patient nutrition. The goal was to provide the community with guidance on the proper ways of quarantining and stress the importance of quarantining to protect community members. Fuerza Arriba ended



these sections with a COVID-19 trivia game that aimed to help the students remember the lesson.

The next section of the COVID-19 curriculum focused on precautions, including social distancing and the use of masks. We believe it is essential to reinforce these safety measures which were harder to prioritize while dealing with the impacts of the hurricanes. We showed data on the effectiveness of masks in reducing transmission rates in COVID-19 epicenters like New York and Italy. Additionally, we provided information from the

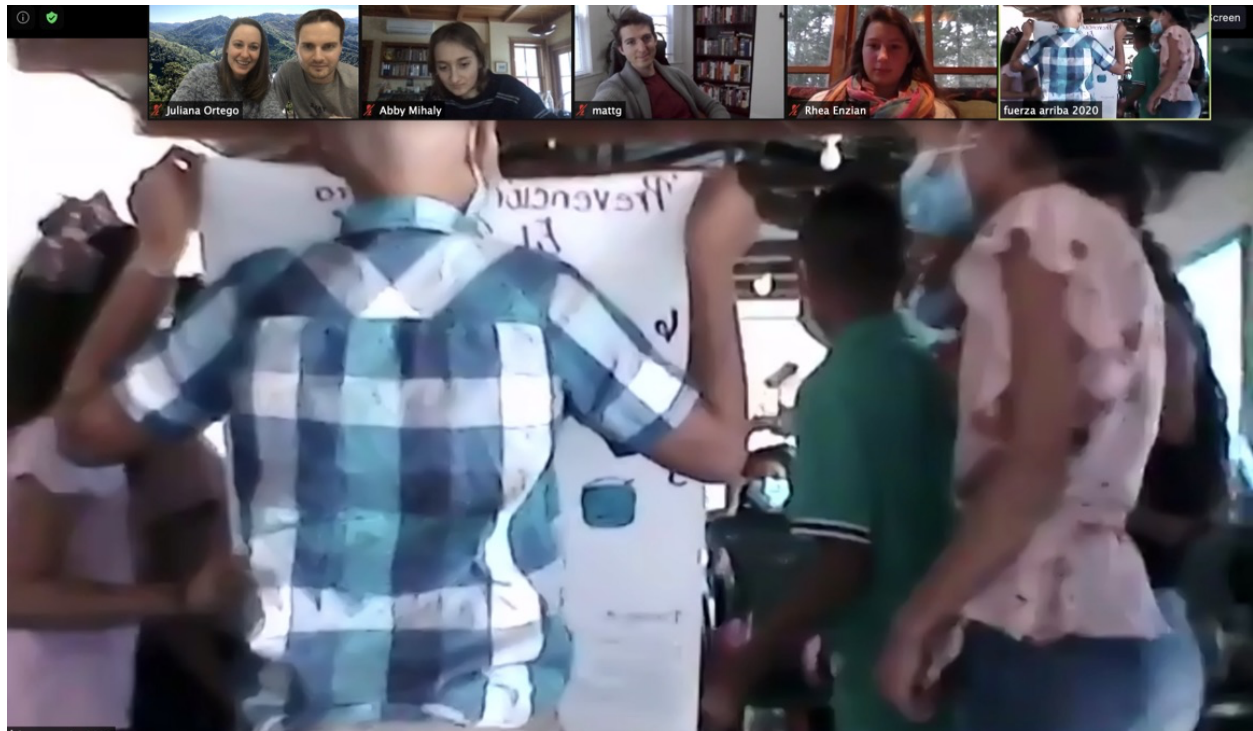


CDC on the different types of masks and who should use each one, and some exceptions on who can't wear masks. The Fuerza were given information on how to make your own mask, the distributions of masks and supplies at the clinic, and instructions on how to wash masks by hand or machine. Fuerza Arriba was encouraged to emphasize that enforcing and following these safety measures should be seen as proactive steps to protect the community rather than punitive rules. Thus, we wanted to help normalize the behavior of asking someone respectfully to wear a mask or take a few steps back and feeling comfortable having these conversations. To end these sections, the students participated in two activities: a demonstration of proper hand washing technique led by the Arriba leaders, and making small posters about social distancing or COVID-19 to put up at home or in public spaces.

Finally, we felt it was important to include a section on dengue fever. As recently as 2019, a Fuerza alum passed away suddenly at the age of 21 from a severe case of dengue. The virus is a growing problem in El Rosario, where much of day-to-day life takes place outdoors. We began by providing information on how dengue is transmitted, the different strains of the virus, and the infection and mortality rates. We then taught about symptoms of dengue and emphasized the differences between dengue and COVID-19 symptoms as well as when individuals should seek medical assistance. We included possible treatments and steps for prevention like using mosquito repellent, clothing covering visible areas of the skin, mosquito nets, and covering standing water. Like with the COVID-19 section, Fuerza Arriba led a trivia game on dengue at the end to help the students retain the information.

Fuerza Arriba did an amazing job at presenting all of this information and successfully teaching the Fuerza kids about these serious topics. While there was a lot of concrete information and facts during these sections, Fuerza Arriba made them engaging by leading trivia games and

choosing information that would most relate to the community. During the debriefs, Fuerza Arriba expressed confidence that these lessons went well. We saw this success during the Fuerza's excellent presentations during graduation.



### **Sex Ed & Violence Prevention**

Aiming to strike a balance between reinforcing material from last year and introducing new material, we incorporated both consent and sex ed into the Fuerza 2020 program. Both portions were delivered by Fuerza Arriba independently. We are so proud of Fuerza Arriba and their excellent delivery of this challenging information.

We began by defining consent. We included several examples demonstrating consent as proactive, ongoing, and non-coercive. We also included a segment on pornography. Given that El Rosario now has access to the internet and many younger people have their own phones, we wanted to introduce the idea that pornography can not only create unrealistic expectations but frequently objectifies women and fails to portray consent. The segment on consent concluded with the Fuerza Arriba students preparing two skits that provided "bad" examples. Once the Arriba student presented these skits to the Fuerza, the Fuerza kids discussed how they could "correct" the skits so that they instead demonstrated examples of great communication and consent. The first skit was a romantic and/or sexual scenario (different for each age group), while the second was an example of consent related to the COVID pandemic, for instance,



navigating boundaries around COVID safety are conversations.

The second portion of this curriculum covered sex education. We began by giving concrete information about different types of contraception and where they can be found in El Rosario. After discussing factual information about birth control, we moved on to talk about how to have conversations about birth control – both between partners and with their parents.

We were so excited to see the Fuerza Arriba students deliver this information to the Fuerza students independently. They demonstrated their maturity and learning by successfully teaching all the information to the Fuerza students. They also helped them engage with the material by creating skits to present to the community. We remained available via Whatsapp, but the Fuerza Arriba barely needed our help – they took full charge of this part of the curriculum.

### **Nutrition, Exercise & Mental Health**



This year the Fuerza team tackled the topics of nutrition and exercise in new and interesting ways, to engage students who already had a basic understanding from previous years. This began with the expansion of the nutrition curriculum to include an introduction to the immune system. We found this fitting

this year, as a healthy immune system is an important element in combating COVID-19. To introduce the students to the immune system, Fuerza Arriba led several games that allowed students to explore terms and ideas relating to immune health. The curriculum placed emphasis not only on defining the immune system, but also on learning ways to build a healthy immune system.

This built well on previous years' nutrition curricula. The students had already explored the concept of a healthy and balanced diet. We revisited this concept to explain how antioxidants and vitamins in certain foods can help increase our metabolism and help our immune system combat diseases. One goal was to apply students' prior knowledge regarding how certain foods can help overall health to the current COVID-19 climate.

Additionally, we introduced a section on hydration. To make this section interactive for the students, we encouraged the Fuerza Arriba leaders to start a team competition to see which team could drink the most amount of water during the week. Many community members, including young children, currently drink soda rather than water. This arises from several factors

including water insecurity. The curriculum discussed the importance of hydration to overall health as well as where to find free, clean water.

Students started each morning with Yoga – just one component of this year’s exercise lessons. To adapt to the virtual setting, the students followed along each morning to pre-recorded yoga classes, as Matt led them through various yoga poses (asanas) and the Fuerza Arriba leaders joined in to demonstrate! This went hand in hand with the hydration portion, as students were encouraged to drink water while exercising. Students also discussed the importance of daily exercise.



This year, the Fuerza program also tackled mental health. This was a topic that was specifically requested by the community due to the challenging global events of the last year. Students discussed mental health by connecting it to the COVID-19 pandemic and made the lessons a space for students to express how they are feeling. Students engaged in a wide variety of activities including a discussion on how they and others they know are feeling in the current pandemic. Students were also encouraged to talk about strategies to improve mental fitness. The lessons aimed to stress that emotions and feelings are not a sign of weakness, but of growth.

### **Construction Project**

The construction project has consistently been a favorite activity for the Fuerza, providing opportunities to not only practice valuable skills, but also to take pride in completing a product that helps the community for years to come.

Given the logistical challenges presented by COVID and aftermath of the hurricanes, a construction project was going to be incredibly challenging to pull off this year. However, the Fuerza Arriba stepped up in their roles as leaders and really impressed us with their initiative. They proposed their own





idea for a construction project that would meet two important needs: provide a safe space for friends and family to get together while social distancing and encourage people to spend more time outdoors, taking breaks from devices and social media. With the help of a local volunteer, they planned the project, organized the materials needed, and completed construction over the weekend following the main Fuerza curriculum.

The project consisted of renovating La Lumita - an elevated clearing just off the road near El Rosario - with new metal stairs and benches to make it a more accessible gathering place. La Lumita is a popular spot for friends and family to meet up, with open space and beautiful views of the surrounding landscape, and with the new benches and stairs it is an ideal destination for safe outdoor socializing.



*La Lumita before (left) and after (above) - the project was completed in time to decorate a tree for the holidays!*

## Looking Ahead

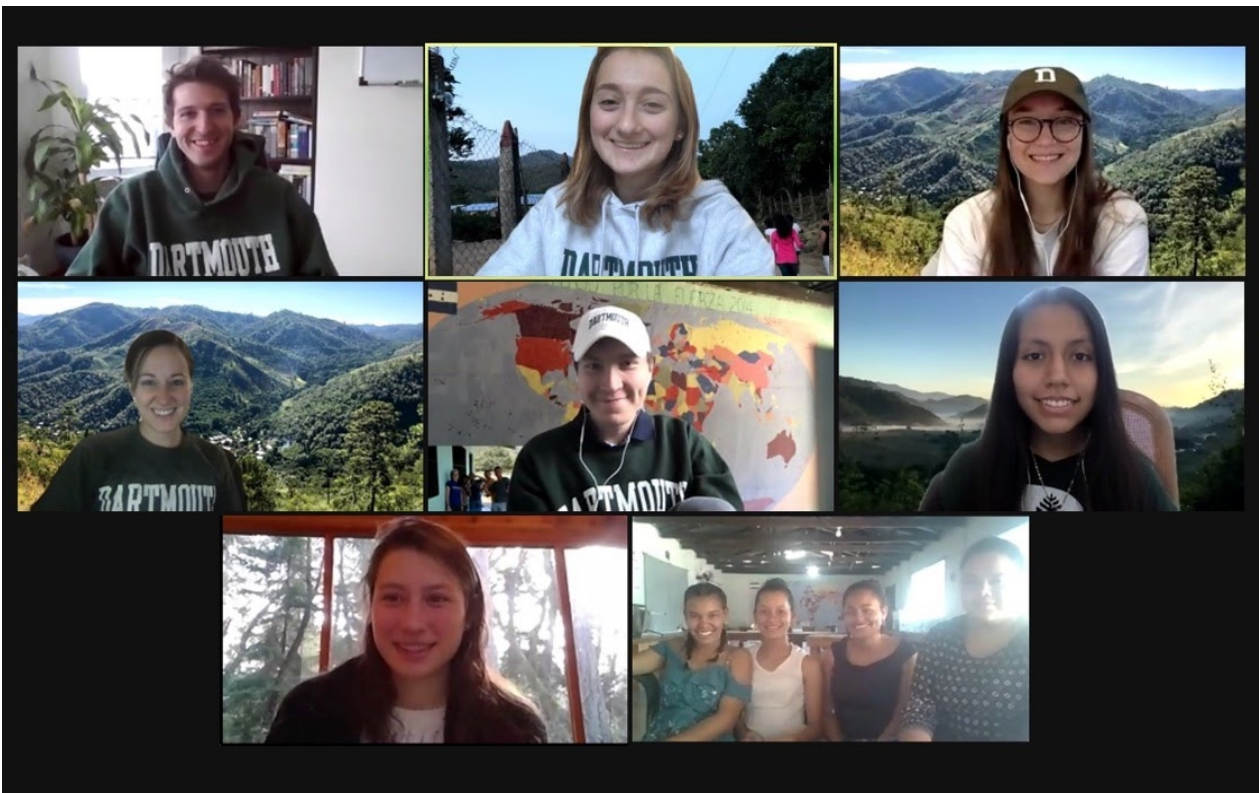
As we conclude 2020, we look forward to Fuerza 2021. In the coming months, we'll focus our efforts on recruiting a team for next year – who, fingers crossed, will be able to lead an in-person Fuerza program in 2021.

Due to this year's remote format, the Fuerza Arriba students stepped up and taught the Fuerza program. We were so incredibly proud of their willingness and capability. The Fuerza program has always aimed to empower students to one day become leaders in their communities – the remote format pushed us, and the Fuerza Arriba, to take the leap and invite them to take charge. We hope to structure the program similarly next year, spending the bulk of our time preparing the program together with the Fuerza Arriba as co-teachers of the Fuerza to empower them to continue to lead the Fuerza both during the weeklong camp and throughout the year.

Matt, Jules, Abby and Rhea had previously traveled to El Rosario, so they brought an understanding of the El Rosario community. Erica, Rene and Maggie had never been to Honduras, so they brought new ideas and energy to the virtual format. We hope they'll return next year, and also hope to find other students who are equally dedicated to education and stewardship to round out next year's team.

Thank you to all of you who have supported our work over the years, and thank you in advance to all who will continue to do so in 2020! As we develop next year's curriculum and programming and fundraise for materials and travel funds, we will continue to be in touch. In the meantime, don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or if you'd like to get involved.

Best wishes from the 2020 Fuerza Team!



*From left to right and top to bottom: Matt Garton D'12, Abby Mihaly D'21, Maggie Flaherty D'21, Jules Ortego D'13/GSB'19, Rene Rodriguez D'22, Erica Bermeo-Matute D'22, Rhea Enzian D'21, Fuerza Arriba. Not pictured: Sarahi Reyes.*