

Rebecca Black – Honduras 2018/2019

It's now been over a month since I arrived back in the UK after spending the past year living in a small town in the mountains of western Honduras. With this report I hope to give you some idea of both what it was I was actually doing there, as well as the impact this year has had on myself and on the Honduran community I was living in. I am extremely grateful to all of you at the Mason Trust for the generous grant you gave me that helped make this whole experience possible.

I spent the year living with a Honduran host family – in total there were ten of us living in the house. Actually living with a family meant that I got to see not only all the highlights of Honduras' vibrant culture – the parades, dances and celebrations – but also how regular people go about their day-to-day lives, which I think played a key part in helping to understand the culture. Hondurans are incredibly welcoming people, and I now feel I have a second family - I am as close with the children in the host family as I am with my real siblings back in the UK.

My role while being there was to teach English to around 230 kids in the kindergarten and primary school. Originally, another volunteer was there with me, but she left halfway through the year, making me the only English teacher. While this presented its own challenges, it has made me a lot more resilient as a person, and I am now a lot more confident in my own abilities. Each day I would teach five or six classes, to kids from the ages of 4 to 12. While teaching was definitely not easy – the beginning was tough, to say the least - it was very rewarding, especially due to Honduras' proximity to the US. Every person you meet there has multiple family members that are living and working in the States, and so the value of knowing English is huge. Many kids in the school have fathers that they haven't seen in years because of this. Whether you agree with the issue of illegal immigration to the US from countries such as Honduras or not, it undeniably has a huge impact on the lives of the people there, and for many is a way of earning more money in order to increase the standard of living of family members back home – one man I met, who was 24, hadn't seen his father since he was 8 years old, but with the money he earned in the US, his father had paid for this man and all eight of his siblings to go to university. My point here is that going to the US is a very common thing in Honduras, and so any knowledge of English is extremely useful.

In terms of the impact this year has had on me, to write it all down would mean a ten-page long letter, so I'm just going to write about the main things. Being a teacher, especially in a country such as Honduras, has made me a lot more understanding, and enabled me to look at issues in a way that isn't so black and white. For example, behaviour was a big problem in the school, and it was hard at times not to get angry or irritated with certain kids that would refuse to do the work or always be messing around. After speaking with a teacher about one child in particular, however, I learned about the child's family situation, and it really showed me that most of the kids that act out have their reasons for being this way – e.g. having a bad home life, or being older than the rest of their classmates due to having been held back a couple years. Knowing this made me realize that there was probably a similar reason behind the behaviour of all of the main 'troublemakers', and helped me deal with it in a patient and understanding manner, as opposed to simply getting annoyed.

Another key impact this year has had on me is on my outlook on life. In Honduras, over 66% of people live below the poverty line, and where I lived, Lempira, was one of the poorest departments of the country itself. That being said, while extreme poverty did exist, the vast majority of the people there were happier than the people in the UK. As cliché as it sounds, it just shows the importance of your outlook on life and appreciating what you've got.

I knew beforehand that my being in Honduras wasn't going to magically transform the lives of all the kids there, but I did hope that I would have a small positive impact on the local community, and I think this was achieved. Just as I had a lot to learn from the Hondurans, their culture and their ways of doing things, there were also aspects of our culture in the UK that were just as important for them to learn about too. For example, littering is a huge issue there – throwing a crisp packet out the window of a bus isn't seen as wrong, it's just the natural thing to do. Because of this, I used World Environment Day to give classes on littering and the impact it has, and we then, in classes, did litter picks of the school and surrounding area. Hopefully, this will have made at least some kids think twice before they litter, and maybe, with time, this awareness can slowly spread.

There is so much more to say about the past year, but this report is already over a page, so I'm going to leave it there. Thank you so much for your role in making this past year, and everything I've learned from it, possible. I have no doubt that my experiences this year will have huge repercussions on the rest of my life. I've attached some pictures below.



