

**Collin Burks**  
**Personal statement**

Living and volunteering in Granada, Nicaragua for a year was truly a transformative experience for me. In Granada, I was a soccer coach, educator, and mentor to a group of high school girls as well as an administrator in the non-profit organization, Soccer Without Borders. During my year there, I became more confident in myself and in my leadership skills, developed patience and flexibility, improved my Spanish dramatically, learned how to work with girls and families, and became skilled at planning events. I developed very close relationships with my co-workers and the girls I was coaching; they taught me an incredible amount about life, family, and Nicaragua, among many other topics.

As an outsider working in a foreign country, I was challenged both personally and professionally. Working through those challenges helped me to improve myself and to better appreciate my work in Granada. Soccer Without Borders is doing an amazing job working with girls and families in Granada, using soccer as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of girls, families, and community members. Before going to Nicaragua, I had not realized how incredible the opportunities I had as a young girl to play soccer and receive a good education were in my life; these two opportunities are not available to most girls in Nicaragua. However, these opportunities are also not available to millions of youth in the United States, a fact that I hope to diminish some in my life. While I will be entering medical school in the fall, I plan to volunteer for organizations that support economically disadvantaged children and families, especially women. I also hope to continue coaching youth soccer.

Community service has been and always will be an integral part of my life, and I am incredibly grateful that I was able to dedicate an entire year to service in Nicaragua. I cannot thank JJCF enough for the support – financial and otherwise – they have given me over the last year. Volunteering for Soccer Without Borders was an eye-opening experience that I will carry with me throughout the rest of my life, forever changed by what I learned and saw in Nicaragua.