

Midterm Report

Submitted August 10, 2013

Coming to Peru was one of the best decisions of my life. Through Expand Peru's flexibility and connections, I have been able to start four projects:

1) A microenterprise program for rural teens

My main project involves working with a group of 10-15 teenage girls to help them set up a sustainable bakery. I teach a class on accounting, marketing, inventory management, and leadership in the afternoons. I have really enjoying forging friendships with the girls outside of the classroom through cultural excursions, games, and arts and crafts. We regularly travel to a town called Concepcion, which is around 15 minutes away by combi, to learn how to bake bread with huge artisanal ovens. The business has almost achieved profitability (we sell around 300-1000 pieces of bread per week), and the girls are now brainstorming work schedules to ensure that the bakery stays sustainable after my departure.

2) A business/art camp at an SOS Children's Village

During the children's school break, I am running morning vocational workshops to teach knitting and jewelry making. Through a partnership with N'SESA International, I hope to sell their scarves and jewelry. Proceeds from sales will go to the orphanage to help purchase more art supplies.

3) A life skills and financial literacy course for young adults

In the evenings, I work with some of the older teens at the SOS Children's Village. These youth are seeking to gain independence and start careers, so we work on English, job interviewing, CV writing, budgeting, and money management. They often invite me to stay for supper, and it is nice to chat with girls who are around my own age.

4) A handicraft cooperative project with unemployed women

My host mother really wanted to participate in the microenterprise project. She said she could assemble a group of alpaca wool knitters to form a business collective, but that they needed marketing assistance and access to capital. I offered to extend a no-interest, no-collateral microloan to help the group purchase initial materials. Since the women do not have email addresses or regular Internet access, I am reaching out to my contacts at Penn as well as various handicraft organizations in Huancayo to find outlets for them to sell their goods locally and internationally. Next week, I will be working with Penn students to create a web-based retail platform.

Challenges: My main challenge at first was the language barrier. In retrospect, I think I was a bit crazy for planning to launch a social venture in Peru after only one semester of

Spanish. Luckily, cultural immersion and the home-stay experience have made it easy to improve my language skills and I am now pretty comfortable with most conversations. Before coming to Peru, I also didn't realize how long it would take for projects to get started. I thought I would begin working with the girls soon after arriving, but it took two weeks to advertise the program, sort out logistics, and find a work venue (partly because of all the holidays in Huancayo that shut down business offices). When Expand Peru approached me about conducting a condensed version of my project with the youth at the SOS Children's Village, I was really excited, but again it took almost three weeks and much frustration to sort out the paperwork and coordinate the partnership.

Changes: My project has changed a great deal from its initial conception. When I applied for an Omprakash Volunteer Grant and a JJCF Grant, I planned to work in the Casa de Bebes program in the mornings and lead my own microfinance/microenterprise project in the afternoon. Although I initially started at the Casa de Bebes, I soon discovered that the baby house was government run and not in need of as much assistance. I find it much more fulfilling to use my business background to promote employment, foster entrepreneurship, and create economic opportunities. Even though it is a lot of work right now to be in leadership positions in a foreign language and country without much supervision (this past week I have been working from around 5 am to 10 pm, preparing and participating in the various projects), I am so, so happy that my initiatives are able to yield direct and measurable results.