

November 28, 2012

Dear JJCF Board Members,

Last year at about this time I was searching for ways to fund a trip abroad to participate in community service. As a graduate student with just a small living stipend paid to me during the year, I was becoming very discouraged as kept coming up with no possible funding sources for my summer plans. With perseverance and a lot of time browsing the Internet, I came upon the JJCF website. I will be forever grateful for learning about your organization. Through your generous support, I was able to work with a non-profit organization in Costa Rica for the full 3 months as I had been hoping.

Abriendo Mentes is a non-profit organization located in Potrero, Costa Rica, which is a very small town on the Pacific Coast. The organization's goals are to empower the community through education covering Technology, English (for both kids and adults), and Women's Empowerment. My main focus was to help put together a comprehensive English curriculum for the Youth English Program, and I also ended up teaching my own Adult English Class. Throughout my time there, I met all of the other volunteers from around the world, became friends with members of the Potrero community, and was able to help many families with their English skills.

By living in Potrero for 3 months, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the culture and needs of the community. Many of my afternoons were spent talking with the kids in English classes or preparing lessons for my adult class. I also had plenty of time to enjoy the beautiful beach with friends and travel to some of the national parks near where we lived. I learned what life in rural Costa Rica is like and the incredible need for everyone to know English for upward economic mobility. Everyone in Potrero was very thankful for the additional education opportunities we brought to them, and even though my time was short, it was truly a truly transformative experience for me.

I want to thank you for supporting young adults like myself in our endeavors to engage in service projects around the world. Like I wrote above, there are few organizations that exist to help us reach our goals. I am currently pursuing my PhD in education and work with many undergraduate students who are looking for similar opportunities. I am excited to share your organization's opportunities with them as well so that they may also fulfill their ambitions.

Again, thank you very much for this incredible opportunity and I hope that you will continue to help young people pursue their interests in service around the world.

Sincerely,
Amara Stuehling