

Overview

The more time I spend in Brasilito, the more I realize how much still needs to be done and how much the community lacks support and adequate resources. I feel that any real change would take years to implement and establish. It can almost feel disheartening to think about the amount of work that still needs to be done. Over the last few weeks I have at times especially felt like an outsider, and have wondered how it must feel for the locals to have volunteers constantly coming and going and thinking that they know what is best for their community. I truly believe that for real change to happen, it is necessary to empower individuals to take hold of their own lives and to enact changes for themselves.

My Role

I recently began taking a more hands on role in my position as Community Development intern. Specifically, I have been working more closely with the on-site psychologist in Casa Brasilito. I accompanied her on two home visits, where we determined whether or not the family could be categorized as living in extreme poverty. The extreme poverty classification would give the woman and children access to food bank donations and support from Casa Brasilito. Both of the houses we visited were in relatively good condition with many amenities. However, the women still faced problems in providing for their families, whether because of the inability to work or other problems generating income. However, since Casa Brasilito has such limited resources we were not able to do much in terms of help. I

came to the realization that there are so many families who live in desperate conditions in Brasilito, that it would be almost impossible to assist all of them.

After speaking with the psychologist, I learned that the government of Costa Rica does not offer a lot of resources or services to the people living in the Guanacaste area. The schools here are much worse than in other parts of Costa Rica, and children have no real standards of learning. Many don't go to school every day and cannot read or write. I began tutoring two children, both around age 7, neither of who can read or do basic math. It is very difficult to try and teach basic skills when those skills are not really reinforced at home and the children have no understanding of how education might affect their lives. When I asked the little boy what he wanted to be when he got older, and how he was going to make money, he told me that he would just rob people.

It is therefore, important to continue working with the community to encourage education and to stress the importance of education on job security and future success. In this regard, Casa Brasilito does try to take steps toward empowering children. Specifically, several children from Brasilito were recently selected to participate in a tutoring program with Reserva Conchal, a local club and high-end community. Since many children have probably never seen anything outside the town of Brasilito, I believe it is important for them to experience life outside of their community and to possibly form goals for their futures.

I also began to organize the girl's soccer team in Brasilito. Our first practice is supposed to be this Sunday and it seems like this is something that can draw a lot of interest from the community. I was able to get other volunteers and expats involved

who will be staying in Brasilito for a longer period of time. There is also an actual soccer coach who is supposed to be coming in August, so I am hoping that the soccer team is something that can go on for a long time and can be a productive activity for the girls in Brasilito. My idea is to make the team something that the girls are in charge of and responsible for. We had them write out a few rules for the team and hopefully they will soon start to feel a sense of ownership. I truly believe that this is a great way to teach responsibility and teamwork.

Conclusion

Overall, I have at times found it very difficult to stay enthusiastic and positive, because so many aspects of this job can be discouraging and overwhelming. This is especially true when it seems like the women or children are not interested in improving themselves or their state of being. I understand that the level of poverty here makes it difficult for people to find motivation to care about anything, especially jobs which are so scarce. However, I also feel that it is important to not encourage dependence on charity and that seems to happen with some families. They become so accustomed to having food or other items provided to them that they have no motivation to work or try to find ways to grow. Abriendo Mentes offers adult English classes and now computer classes for the community, and not very many people take advantage of those opportunities. This can be really frustrating and made me come to the realization that the most important step in helping a community is to first build trust and then change the mindsets of the people living there.