

Algonquin College School of Social Work / SalvAide Delegation to El Salvador

February 2007 ~ update

Hi everyone, we are doing well in El Salvador and here is a quick update.

We continued our visit to the Bajo Lempa Region near the Pacific Ocean. We toured the area that has flooded as a result of hydro electric dams and observed the efforts that the communities have been trying. Sandbag programs did not work and there was the loss of 50 lives two years ago. A series of retaining walls has been built but they have not yet been tested. The people are very vulnerable and each time there is a flood, they lose livestock and soil for food production.

We had a wonderful time with the youth representatives. They are working so hard to support the kids in the rural areas of the province of San Vicente. They are proud because there is no problem with youth gangs in that area....this is one of the most serious social problems in other parts of El Salvador complicated by many recent deportations from the U.S.

We presented our two high school scholarships and the money for the three guitars. They now have 30 scholarships for this year. For every one that is established, there are 80 more kids that could use one.

It is amazing how far \$400 can go here for a year. We will definitely continue to try to raise funds for this cause.

We met the two people who received the scholarships from the Algonquin College SalvAide Project last year. It is nice to see concrete evidence of the work.

We went out in a boat and spent some time on the beach at the Pacific. There were three other families there and that was it....all alone on a beautiful beach. We saw lots of pelicans and other birds that I do not know the names of.

When we came back in the boat, we saw a fire. It turned out that the house beside the eco tourism hostel where we were staying had caught fire and burned to the ground in a matter of minutes. It was caused by someone cooking there and the owner was not home. It was very disturbing because there is no fire department and although the locals worked hard to put it out, it just went poof.

Today we returned to San Salvador and had a meeting with the Social Work students at the University of El Salvador. It was excellent opportunity to hear about their experiences in placements and the social problems affecting Salvadorans. They identified poverty, unemployment, youth gangs, and human rights abuses as the most serious and widespread issues. They also talked about serious problems with access to health care and education.

After that we went to the Canadian Embassy where we had a meeting to discuss our observations and concerns. The students presented their comments in a really professional manner and I was really proud of them. We presented the Chargés d'affaires with some maple syrup. She was thrilled and it turned out she had relatives in Carleton Place.

Tonight I had a meeting with the Director of the Technical College that we have formed a partnership with and we discussed funding for automotive programs. I showed him on the web what Algonquin College has been doing with car dealerships and car companies.

Tomorrow we leave very early for the province of Chalatanango where we will meet with community groups including youth, women, war amputees and people who are fighting against two Canadian gold mining companies.

We handed over the eyeglasses that were donated by people in Perth. They have asked us to continue to collect used eye glasses. Everything is so appreciated here.