



EL CLIMA

The Official Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer Magazine

The Kids Issue + After the Earthquake



03 Kids who run our Classes

04 Head of the Class by Rachel Childs

06 Two Faces by Tori Sims

08 Kids who run our Clubs

09 Gender Equality Starts Here by Courtney Evans

11 Finding a Safe Space: HIAS youth group by Aned Ladino

13 Kids who run our Lives

14 Dear Angel by Rebecca Rainer

16 Francesca the Great by Jonathan VanTreeck

18 After the Earthquake: volunteer reflections

19 Fast Facts

20 The Power of a Book by Devin Olmack

22 I Felt the Earth Move under my Feet by Allison Wilhite

24 Parting Shot



Editor's Note

As Peace Corps volunteers, we inevitably come into contact with local kids. Many of us teach in schools, and virtually all of us lead sessions, camps, or clubs. Work aside, kids run around our neighborhoods and even invade our bedrooms (generally to look for toys or to ask fantastically-blunt, poorly-timed questions.) Interacting with them is a part of each day-- and whether it's a student, a host sibling, or the kid who lives down the street whose mom always gives you the yapa— they often become our favorite part.

Needless to say, we were excited to focus on kids this issue. We asked our authors to write about the relationships they have built with the kids in their communities, specifically in their English classes, extracurricular clubs, and personal lives. Among other things, the resulting articles chronicle what it's like to have a six-year-old for a best friend, how one student changed his class forever, and why "Francesca the Great" is not always so great. We hope you enjoy getting to know our kids-- the kids who run our service.

An additional note on the issue: We felt strongly about addressing the earthquakes in Ecuador—it is something that has greatly affected each of us, our Peace Corps family, and our communities and country of service. We designated the last section of the issue to Peace Corps volunteers' personal accounts of the earthquake and its aftermath. In sharing our stories we hope to promote a deeper level of awareness and a stronger sense of post-disaster support among friends and family of the Peace Corps Ecuador community.

Saludos,

el Clima Team

*yapa=extra/additional amount

El Clima is a digital publication written, organized, and published by Peace Corps volunteers for the broader Peace Corps community.

Melia Cerrato-Content Editor
Courtney Evans-Publication Editor
Robert Jamieson-Photo Editor
Devin Olmack-Social Media/ Recruitment
Tori Sims-Administrative Editor and Copy Editor
Rae Sterrett-Content Editor

Kids who run our Classes



Head^{of the} class

Rachel Childs

It is 9:00 a.m. on a Friday at Escuela Básica Pichincha in the highlands of Ecuador. Mrs. Fanny Flores sits at her desk before 18 sixth graders dressed in grey sweat suits. Two students face her from the other side of the desk. Franco Bonilla, age 10, looks to his classmate, Jhon:

"Le...che" Franco says slowly.

"Le...te" his classmate says.

"Le...che," Franco says again.

"Le...te" his classmate repeats.

Fanny marks "no" on her sheet where she keeps track of the words students say correctly. The next boy, Franco Cumba, is successful with the word "goma," or glue. She gives Franco a point on her sheet. All the students repeat the exercise with different words. Jhon repeats the teacher's name and beams when everyone claps at the end of the activity.

"Jhon is great at learning words because he is very nice and very happy," classmate Samia Perugachi, 11, comments. Jhon Pulsara, 12, has physical disabilities. He can't clearly express his feelings to anyone due to delayed speech, which can be frustrating. A clear sentence is impossible for Jhon to say, so he resorts to short words like "water," or "bathroom."

Fanny and the other students practice with Jhon every week to bump up his word count. His friends and classmates sit with him and repeat an

array of two or three syllable words so that he can build muscle memory.

Walking is out of Jhon's range of mobility. His feet are twisted, and his left hand rests crookedly at his chest. He drags his body with his right hand to move around during recess when he plays soccer.

"Jhon is a great example although he cannot speak or walk," Camila Bonilla, 12, says, "That is because he is a fighter." The sixth grade class welcomes Jhon every day and at least two students carry him into the blue chair and desk in the front of the room. He takes out his large book of assigned work, filled with lines and colored drawings.

But it hasn't always been so easy.

Fanny was overwhelmed when news came of the boy's arrival. She has no prior experience in special education. The district cannot provide the school with a full time licensed special education teacher.

"He pays a lot of attention on his schoolwork. Before, he didn't know anything," Fanny remarks. "He didn't know the difference in colors, or his classmates, or his teachers. His numbers were also difficult."

After building muscle memory for "right" and "left," they include colors and numbers into his assignments. Fanny relates the words to objects such as blood for the color red or John's sweater for the color blue. Jhon's



drawings are colorful and often feature people or animals. One sheet has several numbers with corresponding amounts of people in each box. A smiley face rests at the top. Fanny points out that Jhon drew nothing in the box marked with a zero.

Jhon lives with his mother, Luzmila, at the edge of Morochos in Imbabura, more than a mile from the school. She raises him without help from a father and limited help from the rest of the family. Many of his siblings live in other parts of the country and in Spain.

"He was in a dark world before, because he was only in his house. He couldn't leave or do anything," Fanny said. Kids are similarly unsure how to react to the new classmate. Groups of smaller children stare at Jhon while older students pass him on the playground. But his friends are always there.

"Jhon is my friend and I like to play with him. He is like my brother," Cristian Pichamba, 11, says. "I share my food with him and help take him to the bathroom and take him to play at recess."

Jhon doesn't need words to tell who his friends are: he eats with them, plays marbles with them, and seeks their help on his homework. Friend, Wilder Lanchimba, partners with Jhon during a Teacher's Day activity where they dance on an ever-shrinking piece of newspaper. Wilder holds Jhon's hands without hesitation and beams with excitement.

"Jhon is my friend because we play together and he is pretty smart. I like him," Wilder said.

Jhon also knows who he doesn't like. He points and scowls at a seventh grader who once hit him on the playground. Cristian, Wilder, and many other friends make school pleasant for Jhon. Sometimes he even delays going home so he can hang out with them after school.

"They are so nice to him and treat him as a friend." Fanny says about her class. Because of Jhon "they have become better people."

Top: Jhon and classmate Wilder dance during Teacher's Day activity. Middle: Jhon painting tires for recycled art garden. Bottom: Teacher Fanny Flores, Jhon and classmate Cesar Morales, 10 learning vocabulary words.

Two Faces

Tori Sims

“What is WRONG with you?!”

I remember my teacher’s harsh words and the way my cheeks burned red→→ as hot tears spilled down my face. I hadn’t realized how loudly I was talking until Mrs. Lawrence was standing over me, asking softly and dangerously if I would please come speak with her in the hallway. Never having cried in public before, I looked down in humiliation and remember thinking: why is she a teacher if she hates kids so much?

Mrs. Lawrence came to mind as I looked out upon forty-something students—roughly thirty-eight of whom seemed to be talking, using their cellphones, getting out of their seats, smacking each other, throwing paper balls, or inventing other forms of amusement— participating in what seemed to be a diabolical teacher-shunning ritual from the seventh circle of hell. As my co-teacher stammered in front of the class, my blood began to boil. Fully aware that I would regret losing my temper, I lost it.

I burst into a fit of Spanish and--whether in awe, terror, or sheer confusion-- the class fell completely still:

“SILENCE! You shouldn’t stop talking just because I’m yelling. You should stop talking out of respect for yourselves. You should want to learn



Luis A Martinez students after Christmas caroling in English

English. You should want to challenge and improve yourselves. You can do better. You are all better than this.”

With another beat of palpable silence, I noticed two students in particular who were sitting up straighter, making direct eye contact with me, and really listening.

I had seen one of them, Cristian, in passing the week before. He was a student with an edge that often made teachers feel uncomfortable. I remember one colleague warning, “He is a terrible student. He doesn’t care or want to work.” Easy-to-spot in his earrings, tank top, and snap-back, Cristian had seemed unusually happy to approach me and shake my hand. He had even hovered a bit—strange behavior coming from a young, tough kid at a festival. I then remembered that he had been alone. Late at night and un-accompanied by his usual pack of friends, he had been lonely.

The other attentive student, Alexander, was Cristian’s right-hand man—as quick-witted and likely to sass a teacher as he was lanky. A few months later, Alexander would be suspected of taking part in a classroom theft where multiple smart phones went missing. Seeing him cry with his head hung in shame was truly difficult. The conflict in his eyes made me feel that

he, like Cristian, had more going on than just “being a bad kid.” Not wanting to interfere but unable to help myself, I patted his back and told him to tell the truth... that everything would be ok.

After my spastic lecture, Cristian began a slow, deliberate clap. Then Alexander joined in, and soon the class was applauding. Of course I was mortified, shaking my head to indicate they were missing the point; but their show of support was silly and genuine nonetheless, endearing in a way that only students seem to manage.

Not that we have had particularly stellar academic moments or extensive personal conversations, but I think both boys know that they have found a supporter in me, whether I am bringing Cristian copied pages from the textbook, showing Alexander photos from home, or simply being someone who doesn't believe the very worst.

In retrospect, I empathize with how my teacher was feeling when she asked me what my problem was. Justified or not, my teacher failed in understanding that a student will remember your affect far longer than

the words you use or your reasons for using them. Students can tell when a teacher has a negative opinion of them or thinks them incapable, and they know when we care.

It is the ability to see past a hardened face, the same face that adults throw on when we don't want the world to see us hurting, that allows us to connect with our students and embrace their greater potential. I am lucky enough to have seen two of my students for who they are and not what anybody else might have me believe them to be.

Left: Cristian in English class. Right: Students at Peace Corps Volunteers' English club open house.





Kids who run our Clubs



EL CLIMA
08

Top: Field trip with youth group to "Museo del Banco Central de Ibarra".
Bottom: Adam Shahaar's Youth in Action club in El Oro

Gender Equality starts here

Courtney Evans

In February of 2016, I helped lead a camp for over 200 kids ranging from 8 to 20 years old. The camp was the third of its kind in Pasaje, put on collectively by Adam Shahar (community health), Kate Barba (TEFL), and myself (Youth and Families). Considering we had such a variety of programs to build off of, we decided to have varying themes for the week: nutrition, English, environment, and healthy lifestyles. The camp lasted all week, and the last day focused on the International day for Social Justice.

The theme that I taught was Human Rights. I had two sessions, the first introducing the basic concepts of a human right and the second going into detail on how to fight for and protect our rights. I was blown away by the responses of some students during these exercises. The students were thoughtful and creative in brainstorming ways they could help individuals whose rights were being violated. One of the basic human rights

Gender equality is something that deserves to be protected, and everyone deserves to have the same opportunities regardless of gender.

we learned was the right for children to spend time with friends and play. I did an activity where I “robbed” a girl of this right and asked her how her life would change. She responded, “It would change because I would not have the opportunity to make friends and when I left my house, there would be no one to protect me if I needed help.” Their words were not taken from my mouth, nor were they prompted. They created answers I never even thought of.

Two twin girls in particular, Erika and Karen, were extremely interactive, and their responses were more than I could have expected. They talked about the gap between men’s and women’s rights in Ecuador, specifically the right to marry who you want and the right to education being crucial for success in the long run. When the camp was over, one of the girls, Erika, came up to me

with a slip of paper and asked me to translate it into English. It read:

“Derecho a la igualdad de sexo y el amor libre”

“The right to gender equality and free love”

She proceeded to tell me that she was extremely interested in this topic



Left: Erika and Karen with Volunteers. Right: Leadership class celebrating the fourth of July

and would really like to work with it someday. Both twins started to attend my English classes and eventually came to our Youth in Action group. Much like the camp we held, this youth group would explore various themes ranging from sex education to recycled art to human rights. I am currently training them on how to implement the same sessions covered in camp and youth group so that they can present them to their own communities and schools.

The girls are attending a leadership class I am starting over the course of the next three months. They will not only learn how to be leaders in their community but will create projects that will benefit the community and come directly from the students. Erika and Karen, in particular, have asked for help teaching sessions

about human rights to other children, especially young girls in their community.

These girls are fifteen years old and have maturity and insight well beyond their years. Their passion is contagious, and I am excited to see how they are going to change their community and the world. When I asked both of them why they were particularly interested in the topic and why they wanted to learn how to present this to their community, they responded simply: gender equality is something that deserves to be protected, and everyone deserves to have the same opportunities regardless of gender.

Teaching about basic human rights at camp



Finding a safe space: HIAS youth group

Aned Ladino



PCV Aned Ladino leads a short and long-term goals activity with HIAS youth group.

Yeily, 13, and her sister, Yuliana, 14, used to live in a small, rural town in Colombia but had to move to Ecuador to escape the violence that plagued the town. They arrived in Ibarra, a city located in the northern part of Ecuador, five months ago with their parents and extended family. Their family didn't know anyone in Ibarra, but they knew about my counterpart organization: the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), which assists refugees. The majority of immigrants in Ibarra are Colombian. As a Colombian American, I feel honored to be a part of a cause that I can truly relate to while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ecuador.

The first time I met Yeily and Yuliana, they were in the waiting room at HIAS; and I was conducting a survey

situation, and I believe that they need a routine because they have a lot of free time. That is why we have met every Thursday for the past six months to do different activities which focus on self-esteem, critical thinking, communication, short and long term goals, recycled art, sports, and information about HIV. I know it is not the same as attending school, but they are learning something instead of just watching TV at their house.

For kids like Jose, the HIAS youth group has become like family. He has been able to make friends and to meet other kids that are going through the same process of adaptation. According to Jose, "In the group, we have fun, we share, and at the same time we learn."

about youth rights. They could not answer many of my questions because they were still in the adaptation process and confused about their new life in a new country-- with a new culture, new people, and new food. They did not know anything about the school system and did not understand why they couldn't go to school with the other kids. Many of the young refugees who arrive in Ecuador a month or two into the school year, were not allowed to enroll that semester.

The biggest challenge for refugee children and immigrant population is integrating into the Ecuadorian society. They face a high rate of discrimination because of negative stereotypes about Colombians. Such stereotypes suggest

that they are all thieves, drug dealers, criminals, deceivers, problems-- and that the women are prostitutes. These stereotypes have made finding a place to live difficult for some refugees. Landlords have even told them, "We do not rent to Colombians."

For Paula, a 15-year-old girl who arrived in Ecuador last month, integration has been particularly difficult. "People here are mean to me just because I am Colombian," Paula said, "When they notice my accent, their attitude changes."

The ones who are able attend school are met with discrimination from their classmates. Jose, a 13-year-old, has been living in Ecuador for over a year but still experiences difficulties when attending school. He says that some of his classmates call him names and try to start fights with him. One time, they even threw rocks at him.

The psychologist at HIAS and I lead a youth group for the refugee youth. We started with six teenagers, and now we have a total of twelve. Ten of the members are not allowed to go to school because they arrived in Ecuador in December or January after the school year had already begun. I feel powerless about their



"In the HIAS youth group, twelve Colombian refugees can be themselves and know that they will not be judged. They have found a safe space!"



One of their favorite activities was about self-esteem. They each had a piece of paper taped to their backs and had to write something positive on their peers' backs. They were excited to know that other people see positive qualities in them because so often they only hear negative stereotypes thrown at them or their families. After the activity, some kids wanted to keep their paper taped to their backs, as though they were shrouded with a cape of positivity.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, I feel lucky to be working with my kids, and I am very proud of them! They have learned to work together and have become a family. They are excited to come to HIAS every Thursday regardless of the 30-minute walk that some of them make. The youth group has been a support system for this group of refugee kids. Most importantly, some of them have increased their self-esteem and confidence. In the HIAS youth group, twelve Colombian refugees can be themselves and know that they will not be judged. They have found a safe space!

Top: HIAS youth group having fun with a self-esteem exercise. Bottom: PCV Aned Ladino having a good time while teaching about critical thinking.



Left: Mario Marchioni's host brother napping. Right: Logan Marx and host brother having fun

Kids who run our Lives

Dear Angel

Rebecca Rainer



Rebecca and Angel playing at his house in Tixan.

Note to reader: Six-year- old Angel Lema began as Volunteer Rebecca's host brother, but he quickly became her friend and biggest supporter at her site in Tixan. The following is a letter she wrote for him:

Dear Angel,

It definitely wasn't love at first sight, and I know you would agree wholeheartedly. Your little brown eyes peered up at me with terror as we shuffled past each other, all the while trying not to get too close.

We kept the chatting to a minimum and gave each other more than enough space. I don't remember when or how, but soon that space dissipated. Now I can't walk around my site without people asking where you are and why you aren't by my side. Somehow you morphed into my six-year- old bestie, and there are so many reasons why I love (mostly) every second of it.

First, there is your love of all things sugary. Whenever I'm baking, I know you'll be the first to offer your "help." As you crack the eggs, half of the egg white and yolk inevitably slide down the outside of the bowl and onto the table. I measure the sugar into a cup and wait for you to dip in a finger and taste it before pouring it in. I watch as you haphazardly stir in the rest of the ingredients, smearing globs of batter from your hands onto your face. Once the batter is poured into the cake mold you make sure to lick every last sweet morsel from the bowl. We both pace impatiently around the kitchen while we wait for the cake to bake, and I have to fend you off from digging your sticky fingers into the cake while it's still in the oven. Once the cake is done, we both immediately pop a piece into our mouths unable to wait the ten minutes that it takes to cool down.

Your love of sugar is quickly followed by your love of sleep. Your ability to sleep pretty much anywhere is astounding, like when you fell asleep at the dinner table and then proceeded to fall off of your chair.

After Christmas festivities, we took a cramped, late night camioneta (truck) back to Tixan from the campo (countryside). You managed to fall asleep on my lap, even as the car jostled us around on the mountainous dirt roads. We finally arrived at our stop an hour after you settled into your nap, but you refused to get up

rendering me prisoner to the camioneta. Tears puddled in your eyes, skimmed your cheeks, and fell into my lap after we shook you from your unconscious state. Your sister and I then had to lure you out of the car with none other than the promise of candy. It's good to know that your love of sugar is so reliable!

Besides sugar and sleep, there is your eagerness to play and explore. On the weekends it's inevitable that you will round up your friends and family to start a soccer game in the street. Whenever I have possession the ball, you manage to sprint towards me, flail a foot in the direction of the ball, miss, and then kick me in the ankles instead. My personal favorite is when you finally break away with the ball, trip over it, and then topple onto the concrete giggling. You always bounce right back and then sprint to the next pair of unlucky ankles. I can easily say that we all leave the game sporting our newest battle wounds compliments of you. Keep on keeping on, little one.

Because of you, my experience in Peace Corps has been loud, hectic, and more than amazing. Not only were you forced to be my family member, but now you are forced to be my friend for life. I know it's more than you bargained for, but I expect to be invited to your graduations and your wedding. You helped to transform my experience in this sleepy town from dull to exciting, and I don't know how to thank you for it. Hopefully a chocolate cake with Nutella will do.

Besos (kisses),

Rebecca

Left: Angel anxiously awaiting to blow out his candles and dig into his birthday cake. Right: Angel taking an afternoon siesta on the hard concrete, approximately 10 feet away from the closest comfy bed.



Francesca, The Great

Jonathan VanTreeck



See what I mean?! Adorable in her white poncho!

I had never interacted with three-year-olds before joining the Peace Corps. On my first visit to site, I met Francesca and I was excited beyond belief. How could I not be? With her humongous, shiny, brown eyes, a smile that lit up the room, and standing at an intimidating three-and-a-half feet tall, the only word to describe her was simply: adorable. This excitement, however, eventually diminished. After moving into my host family's house in San Pablito de Agualongo, it did not take long for me to find out that Francesca actually bothered me. A LOT.

At the time, her behavior felt like a deal-breaker. For one, she was the biggest "llorona" (cry-baby). During my first four months in site, I remember waking up to her noisy crying at 5:30 am almost daily. That got old real fast. Making things worse, she would interrupt you and anyone else that was talking. If you ignored her, she would yell louder

to get your attention. She would even throw open my door, march towards the box of colored pencils near my bed, take out a handful, and throw them in the air! It seemed that the louder they hit the ceiling, the better. This behavior continued for months.

I started to notice a trend: the bigger reaction she got, the happier she felt. I did my best to ignore her annoying tendencies, but it proved difficult as she was home all the time. I tried to focus on her cuteness, but I found myself slowly giving up on interacting with her.

Then, my dad, who is a very wise, reflective man came to visit me in Ecuador. After nine months away, one of the things I brought up, naturally, was Francesca. My father is a clinical psychotherapist so discussing people's problems comes second nature to him. We eventually concluded that my host sister had been lacking positive attention, which made me think: she is at a prime developmental stage in her life. I

realized engaging her in positive reinforcement for the next 1.5 years could really make a difference. After all, the girl seemed to have been desperately seeking this type of connection. I was up for the challenge.

My dad helped me empathize with Francesca. Now I take every opportunity to highlight her doing something good, even remotely so. "Ooooh Francesca! I love how you just listened to Lusmila (host mom) right now. I like it when you're so respectful!" After a while, I found the little one spending more time with me. Just a few weeks ago, I remember walking into the kitchen and Francesca giving me a HUGE hug. As Lusmila saw this, she said, "You know, she never used to do that before. Not with us, or with anyone." I don't remember responding, except with a smile.



Promoting cross-cultural learning by teaching Francesca to 'rock on'



"She really trusts you," Lusmila said back.

Don't get me wrong: things are not perfect with her. She's still my alarm clock at 5:30 am and she'll still interrupt you from time to time. Nevertheless, things have improved-- that I am sure of. Our relationship is stronger than before, and we mutually want to spend more time with each other. The other day, I crouched down to hug her and with a tight squeeze, she yelled, "Mi hermano!" (my brother).

Youth development can be practiced within: communities, classrooms, and families. I'm learning that, although volunteers have the capacity to impact a community, perhaps investing in the positive change of one individual makes even more of a difference.



Francesca using my height to her advantage at a baptism mass

After ^{the} earthquake Volunteer reflections

Some of the Facts



-A 7.8 magnitude earthquake struck Esmeraldas, Ecuador on April 16, 2016

-There have been 71 earthquakes since including 6.2, 6.7, 6.8, and 6.3 magnitude aftershocks

-State of emergency was declared in 6 provinces

-There was no electricity, telephone lines and cellphone services collapsed

-There were over 660 fatalities and 8,340 injured and more than 25,000 people living in shelters

-It caused damage to 1,000 kilometers of road

-Over 7,000 buildings were destroyed

-Ecuador faces \$3 billion in economic losses

-10,000 military personnel and 3,500 police officers were deployed

-941 rescue specialists arrived from other countries

-609 Ecuadorian firefighters helped search and rescue

-113 people were rescued

Ways you can get involved and help:

-UNICEFUSA.org

URL: <https://www.unicefusa.org/donate/support-unicefs-earthquake-relief-efforts-ecuador/30257>

-GLOBALGIVING.ORG PROJECT #23863

-Contact a current or returned Peace Corps volunteer, and get in touch with Kerry Cavanaugh, Alex Muñoz, or Nikki Samaniego.

The Power of a Book:

Answering the “why” for children
affected by the earthquake

Devin Olmack

My favorite questions when I was younger always began with “why.”

“Dad, why do you have to go to work?” or “Grandma, why are the strawberries so much better at your house?” (Hint: she put sugar on them.) Our understanding of how the world works as adults is largely informed by the answers to our “why” questions as children.

Unfortunately, some of these questions can be particularly difficult to answer: Why was there an earthquake? Why did my friend have to move away? Why are there more earthquakes? Why do I have nightmares about the earth shaking?

To help answer these difficult questions, Chandra Ghosh Ippan wrote a story called *Trinka y Juan, un Día que la Tierra Movi6* (Trinka and Sam a day the earth moved). This story was developed in collaboration with the Early Trauma Treatment Network, the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, and Joplin School District. The story was first created for use after Hurricane Katrina in the states where Trinka and Juan experience a hurricane instead of an earthquake. The story was then adapted for the earthquake in Chile in 2010 and translated to Spanish. The 23-page story explores the lives of Trinka and Juan before the earthquake; they jump rope, play in the park, and go to school. After

the earthquake, their whole world changes. The book is a gateway for children and parents to discuss the effects of an earthquake and the tough emotions that follow. It attempts to answer the biggest why questions: why the earthquake happened, why their friends moved away, why there continue to be aftershocks, and why nightmares are happening.

UNICEF has estimated that 250,000 children were affected by the earthquake in Ecuador. This means there are 250,000 kids with a lot of why questions-- 250,000 kids who need to read *Trinka y Juan*. My counterpart organization, Clara Luna in Puerto L6pez, has teamed up with Librería Rayuela in Quito to bring copies of these books to children in the affected areas. Librería Rayelua has worked on the logistics of getting the book to Ecuador, soliciting donations for printing, and the actual printing of the book. The Clara Luna director, Paola Mart6nez, and other volunteers are then responsible for delivering the books and giving charlas (talks) to the affected areas of northern provinces, Manab6 and Esmeraldas.

Puerto L6pez has been affected more emotionally and mentally than structurally. It is apparent in just about every child I work with. They were terrified to leave their homes; they were traumatized to leave their parents-- and sleeping made nearly impossible in the

face of very real nightmares and even realer aftershocks. Paola and I were in agreement that Trinka and Juan should be brought to Puerto López. We had a meeting with all the parents of the children we work with to share the book and ways to use it with their children. A week later, we saw drastic changes in the behavior of the children. More and more children were returning to Clara Luna for after-school programs. There were children playing in the street again. And little by little, parents stopped reporting their child's inability to sleep through the night.

When we think of earthquake relief and response, we typically think of basic necessities, medical supplies, and rebuilding materials. Unfortunately, we are often forgetting the emotional and mental needs of the people affected by a traumatic situation and the "whys" that plague them. Trinka and Juan has shown me that earthquake relief can come in the smallest and strangest forms... And that the power of a book is indescribable.

Top Right: Community member reading the book to granddaughter. Middle: Devin with her counterpart. Bottom: Working with the community



I Felt ^{the} Earth move ^{under} ^{my} feet

Allison Wilhite



Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Alex Munoz helping to pass out supplies to members of the Rio-canoa Community.

A few weeks ago, I had planned to write a blog about my time giving a teacher training in Portoviejo and relaxing on the beautiful beach in Manta... but then the unimaginable happened.

On Saturday, April 16 at 6:58 PM, a 7.8 earthquake violently shook the coast of Ecuador, devastating communities of the Manabí and Esmeraldas provinces. It was felt as far as Colombia and cut off the power in many cities throughout Ecuador. Portoviejo was one of the cities most impacted by the earthquake; buildings collapsed, rubble blocked the roads, and the number of dead and missing rose by the hour. And I was there.

Although it's been more than three weeks since the earthquake, I still find it hard to write about. I've returned to my site in Ambato, and life for me has resumed as normal. However, when I'm asked about the earthquake – "You were there, Alli, weren't you? How was it? Did you see any dead people?" – I'm back there again, re-living those terrifying moments during the aftermath.

Our taxi pulls up to the curb in front of the bus terminal. I pay the driver and walk to the trunk to grab my backpack. I feel the ground vibrating and at first think it is from a passing bus. It keeps vibrating, and I look down at the ground, wondering if there is a subway; it sounds like the rumbling of a train. That is when I realize it is something more – we are experiencing an earthquake. I keep my feet shoulder-width apart and try to maintain balance as the ground shakes from side to side. Next to me are Sara and Tamara, two fellow volunteers. The ground pitches, nearly knocking me over. The lights flash and go out, throwing us into the semi-darkness of dusk. I hear some people yelling in the distance and see others running from the terminal to the street for safety. I watch as the light post next to me sways back and forth, vigilant in case it topples over.

Across the street, a power line bounces dangerously near to the gas station below. I yell to my friends to watch the posts. When I look away from the posts and back to my friends, I see that two strangers have joined us. They are holding on to Tamara and Sarah and making the sign of the cross in prayer. I then hear crumbling and look to my left in time to watch the terminal's cement façade crash to the ground in pieces. Again in the distance I hear screaming, but the kind I've only heard in movies – screams of life-threatening fear.

The 45 seconds of shaking lasts longer than any other quake I have experienced. When the shaking stops, the taxi driver looks at us with startled eyes and excuses himself, saying he needs to check on his family. He speeds away

quickly. An older man is standing near me with watery eyes, and I grab his shoulder to ask if he is alright. He nods and says a prayer to God. I pause and realize my own heart beating rapidly in my chest. The adrenaline is keeping me focused.

It is then that we notice a strong, thick smell that fills the air. I look back at the gas station, but I'm away. I look at Tamara and Sara, and they ask me what we should do. I say we should move away from the station. We grab our bags and quickly walk to the end of the street, turning right toward the bus terminal exit. By luck we run into Katie and Robert, the other two volunteers trying to head home. All five of us together, we stand on the corner and look for any bus headed toward our sites – Santo Domingo, Guayaquil, or Ambato. Another man waiting for the bus to Ambato is there, and we chat briefly. He offers us each a wet wipe to cover our mouths from the smell. We try calling our friend Zack, whose apartment is nearby, and our security director in Quito, but the lines are jammed.

Finally, Sarah is able to connect with both to confirm we are all safe. Our director instructs us to stay away from buildings in case of aftershocks and to try to meet up with Zack. By now it is completely dark, and we can only see by the headlights of passing cars. We wait another 20 minutes or so trying to flag down a taxi, but no one stops. At some point we witness a robbery. The night lingers on.

People want to hear about the destruction, but not the loss-- the fear in the moment, but not the grief that followed. I don't blame them for wanting the story, but I also can't join them in the thrill of hearing it. The earthquake was more than some sensational news story. The

devastation and loss are real and still strongly felt by all those affected. I recognize that I was extremely lucky – blessed even, as some have put it – to survive. I find myself feeling “survivor’s guilt,” wondering why I was so fortunate when others weren’t. As such, I feel it is my responsibility to raise awareness. But instead of focusing on those aspects of an experience both numbing and horrific, I also want to share the immense, soul-warming acts of support that followed.

As soon as Ecuadorians throughout the country realized the impact of what had happened, they immediately volunteered to help those in need. Collection centers were opened for donations, and people even set up collection tables on street corners. Rescue teams sprang into action and worked their way over damaged roads, waiting for hours in long lines of traffic to deliver necessary medical and food supplies. Schools cancelled classes to let students sort and send boxes of medicine, food, baby supplies, and more with notes of solidarity. Such is the epitome of the Ecuadorian spirit-- that their first reaction was to help in any way possible.

Community members and organizers of Bellavista come together to organize relief efforts.





Left: Shout outs to Zack Hersh and Erin Fischer for their awesome leadership at Camp Mindo! Right: Melia reads to camper in Machala

//Our Greatest natural treasure is in the minds of our Children".

-Walt Disney