

Aya Nagai

Graduation Year: Sophomore

College: Arts & Letters

Major(s): International Economics

Minors(s): International Development Studies

Scholar Group Membership: No

Did you received other funding for this project?: No

Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding? No

More details on CUSE funding assistance? Without CUSE, my family would not have been able to pay for this experience, and I cannot be more grateful to have had this opportunity.

Project Title: Providing Windows and Mirrors in Costa Rica

Project Location: Heredia, Costa Rica

ND Faculty Mentor: Diana Jorza

Project Type: Service-Learning

Why did you undertake this project/experience? Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Internationalize your Notre Dame experience

Did your funded experience help you:

[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]: Yes

[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]: Yes

[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]: Yes

[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]: Very Much

[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:Very Much

Tell us about your experience.

I brought about 100 books donated by Better World Books in Mishawaka to a local care center in Heredia, Costa Rica. In addition to helping out teachers in various classes by supporting students that were behind in the subjects, I was able to have some time to read with children and conduct activities (skits, drawing, English lesson, physical games) based on the content of the books.

One big takeaway is the difficulty of paying attention to individual students when the class size is easily larger than 40. It is hard enough to conduct a class itself, let alone responding to unique needs of individuals during the class.

This lead me to think about children with special needs, especially with autism spectrum disorder since there were a couple in each class, and how difficult it must be for them and for their families. This is an issue I want to learn more about through my senior research, and I am glad that I got to get a sense of what the educational system is like in Costa Rica and in many other countries in central america before I conduct the reseach.

Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.

Even though the children were reluctant to have "cuentacuentos", reading time, at the beginning of the week, they came to enjoy reading and even asked for me to read for them at the end of the week. Therefore, I believe that the biggest impact of this project was to make them realize of how fun reading can be. Another impact I was able to make, even though this is minute, is that I was able to tell teachers how amazing and respectable what they are doing. They not only are overworked and underpaid, but also do not receive the respect that they deserve in the society. I hope that I was able to tell them from a perspective of a foreigner that what they are doing is truly meaningful.

As for me, one impact this project had on me, like other service projects that I have done in the past, is the frustration. I encountered numerous issues that I cannot do anything about--they are problems revolving around the mindset of the people that have been passed down generation to generation, around their government, and around their societal values. Lack of schools and teachers, percentage of students that drop out due to pregnancy, lack of sanitation system, the list can go a lot longer. Even though Costa Rica is a beautiful country with vibrant culture and so much potential, it is hard to oversee the problems they are facing. And there is so little we can do as students, as foreigners, as volunteers... However, this frustration is what motivates me to study harder and learn more so that I can one day be helpful in solving one of the many issues they are having and opening more possibilities for people.

Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.

I was able to practice Spanish with children ages from 5-10, the target range for my senior research. By observing the school system and having conversation with teachers and parents, I have a better sense of education in Costa Rica and in Latin America in general, and I will be able to ask more locally-rooted, meaningful questions regarding the educational system to discern my senior research topic.

What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?

Be independent and look for what you can do on your own even when you do not have the guidance you need. Do not be discouraged by the realization of how little you can do. 0.1 is still better than 0. Nothing happens if you do not take an action.

I acknowledge that this form has been filled out truthfully and to the best of my ability. I understand that this information will be shared with many different CUSE constituencies. As such, I have provided as much useful information as I was able. I understand that CUSE will not complete my award disbursement until this form is successfully completed. If I have any questions or concerns, I will contact CUSE before submitting this form. To illustrate that you understand all of these points, please enter your Notre Dame email in the box below.
anagai@nd.edu

