

FUERZA HONDURAS

Newsletter – January 2019

December 2018 marked the 10th year of the *Fuerza para el futuro* youth leadership program. This year, forty Honduran students came together for one week to work with students from Dartmouth College and Stanford Graduate School of Business to develop their abilities as leaders and give back to their community. Our curriculum was specifically focused on nutrition, a growing concern in the region. Students also dedicated significant time and hard work to construct safety boxes for the storage of agricultural chemicals. This project was designed as a follow-up to last year's Fuerza topic of educating families on the dangers of storing agricultural chemicals in the home. The students approached the program with as much energy as ever, enthusiastically taking ownership of their projects and showing great pride in all they accomplished throughout the week.

Fuerza Curriculum

The Fuerza curriculum is designed to help students understand the importance of leadership in their communities and develop the skills they need to become future community leaders. Through a variety of interactive activities, students have the opportunity to learn skills such as teamwork, communication, public speaking, and creative problem solving. They then have the opportunity to practice implementing those skills through project-based work. Typically, this entails creating and delivering educational presentations on current public health initiatives.

This year, the students took on the project of nutrition education. Nutrition has been a growing concern in the region. In a recent health program in the community schools, doctors found 27% of the children to be malnourished. We believe the principal driver of this is increased consumption of processed foods, such as soda, chips, and candy. Over recent years, these food options have been introduced to the local market and there has been little education around the poor nutritional value of these foods. In fact, most families view popular brand name products as novelty items and, although they're more expensive than locally produced crops, they now allocate a large percentage of their daily wages to purchasing them.



Student's use library resources to conduct research for their nutrition presentations

Given the Fuerza students' past success educating their communities on important health topics, they seemed like the perfect group of young leaders to kickstart this initiative. We began the week by first educating them on how to plan a balanced diet. Dartmouth students had spent the months prior to the trip working with nutrition graduate students to create curricula customized to the types of foods available in the area. Once they shared this information with the Fuerza, the students began working hard to further research the nutritional value and costs of the food options available to them. They then prepared skits and posters to demonstrate how to best budget a daily wage to purchase healthy, nutrient-rich foods and achieve a balanced diet. They traveled to five villages in the region to share their presentations.



A lively demonstration of the drastic price difference between healthy and non-health food options



(Left) Students perform a skit about the importance of infant nutrition, encouraging mothers to breastfeed. Some mothers had been feeding babies soda and coffee, not realizing their harmful effects



(Right) A presentation on the importance of staying hydrated by drinking 8 glasses of water per day

The Fuerza made great strides in creating an initial level of nutritional awareness. Still, changing routine behavior takes time and this is just the beginning. Students will continue to serve as ambassadors of this information and will hopefully drive change by example, encouraging their families to adopt healthier eating habits as well. We hope to continue working with them on this initiative for many years to come.

Construction

Two students from the Stanford Graduate School of Business joined our team this year to lead an advanced construction project: the construction of 78 chemical storage safety boxes. This project was a continuation of an ongoing Fuerza initiative to educate families on the dangers of agricultural chemicals. In past years, students presented about measures farmers could take to protect themselves while using the chemicals and to protect their families who are also exposed to these chemicals at home. The goal of the construction project was two-fold: (1) to teach students about different manufacturing processes, and (2) to construct a valuable piece of equipment that could help families improve safety conditions in their homes.



Stanford GSB students teach students how to safely use construction tools like hammers and hand saws



Though we had a target number of boxes to build, we focused particularly on the construction process. Students learned proper techniques for using hand saws, T-squares, hammers, and screwdrivers. They also learned about two different types of manufacturing processes. The first involved assigning groups of four to a work station with each work station being responsible for creating different components of the boxes simultaneously (e.g., assembling side panels, connecting the side panels, cutting measured pieces of wood, etc.). The second process was a traditional assembly line, in which boxes passed from work station to work station with each station being responsible for adding a new fixture to the box. There was strict distribution and organization

of tools and materials. Students learned about the importance of an organized process and related it to the type of work flows used in many maquilas (local factories). Learning this was particularly valuable to students who are currently interviewing for maquila jobs, which are highly desired due to their high pay, health benefits, and consistent work schedules.

In the end, the students saw how much they could accomplish in just 3 days through a combination of teamwork and an organized approach. They constructed 78 boxes, which were all distributed to the families that attended the nutrition presentations. People excitedly took their new boxes home, saying that they were happy to have a way to secure their costly agricultural chemicals without endangering their families.



Abraham demonstrates the safe use of chemicals as he sprays the boxes with a protective varnish



Families transporting their new boxes to their homes

Fuerza Arriba

This year we also continued with the recently established Fuerza Arriba program. This program was created for a subset of older students who, over the years, have taken the initiative to lead community development projects on their own. These students planned their own schedule for the week, which consisted of traveling to other communities to work with families and running a library program for children. They also spent time mentoring younger Fuerza students. They held a “dress rehearsal” where they shared feedback and tips to help students as they prepared their nutrition presentations.



(Above & Left) Fuerza Arriba leaders read to children as part of the library programming they organized. Students will continue to volunteer in the library throughout the year

(Right) The Fuerza Arriba giving advice to Fuerza students as they prepare their nutrition presentations



Additionally, the Fuerza Arriba has decided to establish a structured year-round volunteer program. Going forward, all Fuerza students over the age of 14 years old will need to complete 4 hours of volunteer work per month. The Arriba coordinated with the clinic nurse and local librarian to create a schedule and volunteer sign-up to assist in the library and health clinic. They've also each committed to lead a monthly clean-up day, where students will collect and dispose of litter from around the community. The establishment of self-led year-round programming is a demonstration of the initiative the Arriba students have shown to take more ownership of the program and the wellbeing of their community.



The Fuerza Arriba worked with families in Los Planes, a neighboring village, to teach about family health



Fuerza Arriba leaders at the program graduation ceremony

Looking Forward

With the conclusion of another successful year, we now look ahead as we prepare for our next program in December 2019. This winter we are focused on recruiting and fundraising efforts as we expand our team of students passionate about sustainable community development and education. We will keep you updated as our curriculum takes shape. Thank you for all of the support you have given us over the years, and please don't hesitate to reach out if you're interested in learning more or getting involved!

Best wishes from the Fuerza 2018 Team!



(From Left to Right) AJ Spiegelman D'19, Chad Kitzinger GSB'19, Catherine Shepherd D'19, Alejandro Aguirre GSB'19, Abby Mihaly D'21, Jules Ortego D'13 / GSB'19, Anna Nguyen D'21, Davidson Emanuels D'19