



Peace Corps Ecuador Children and Youth Development

Claire Williamson

University of Michigan School of Social Work - Master's International



Quito, Ecuador

Ecuador is a small, megadiverse country in the northwest part of South America. Quito is the capital, seated along the equator high in the Andes Mountains with a population of roughly 2.5 million. Quito, a World Heritage Site, has a rich culture and history dating back to 16th century, and contains one of the most well preserved historic centers in Latin America.

Languages: Spanish and Kichwa

Religion: Roman Catholic

Ethnic Groups: Mestizo, Afro-Ecuadorian, Native/Indigenous

Currency: US dollar

Exports: Bananas, coffee, tuna, petroleum

Peace Corps Ecuador

- Established in 1962
- Over 6,275 volunteers have served
- Current Programs
 - Youth Development
 - Community Health
 - Teaching English



Acknowledgements

- A big thanks to Katie Lopez and other staff in the Office of Global Activities. Your continual support before, during and after my Peace Corps service has been greatly appreciated!
- My fellow Master's International RPCVs of Team 93: Greta, Lauren and Lillie, having your friendship and understanding throughout this process has helped me significantly.
- Friends and family both near and far, thank you for being a part of my life.
- To the beautiful people of Ecuador and my kids at El Hogar, you have stolen my heart and taught me so much. I am forever changed by my experience.

Host Country Agency

Hogar del Niño San Vicente de Paúl

- Founded in 1876 in the historic center of Quito
- Non-profit Institutional Foster Care and Orphanage serving at-risk or abandoned children and youth ages 0 to 18
- Funded and directed by Hijos de la Caridad (Daughters of Charity) with help from the Ecuadorian government



El Hogar, Historic Center, Quito

Skills Developed

- Community assessment and organizing
- Spanish speaking and writing skills
- Planning and facilitation skills
- Case management skills
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Adaptability, flexibility and resilience

Projects & Outcomes

Throughout my two years in Ecuador, I worked full time in El Hogar. I provided continual support, guidance and assistance to the ~75 children and 40 staff members in the orphanage while gaining trust and building positive relationships and rapport.

As a volunteer I:

- Co-taught a group of 10 children ages 2-3 in a day-care like setting on manners, sharing and behavioral management
- Created and facilitated a youth group with 12 adolescents ages 9-16, meet weekly for 2 hours and presented workshops on life skills such as: self-esteem, values, leadership, autonomy, critical thinking and positive behavioral management, an increased respect and understanding of these life skills was observed in the youth during the two years
- Assisted the Social Workers and Psychologists in the technical team office: case management, documentation, and accompanied on home visits and medical appointments, intercultural exchanges of skills and knowledge occurred on a daily basis
- Offered after school tutoring for English homework to the children ages 5-16, an increase in English grades was observed after months of tutoring

Other Projects

I also helped plan and facilitate various informational and technical trainings for trainees and host families at the Peace Corps office located in Quito.

Lessons Learned

- Building meaningful relationships is more important than big projects
- The children and youth made a bigger impact on me than I made on them
- I am stronger than I give myself credit for
- "Poco a poco" – little by little

Classroom Connections

The classes I took in my first year in the School of Social Work proved to be very helpful in preparing me for some of the work I did in Ecuador with children and youth.

- SW 799 Youth Empowerment
- SW 601 Adolescent Development
- SW 648 Issues in Global Social Work Practice

Career Connections

I had the wonderful opportunity to work alongside social workers at El Hogar. During my two years, I learned about and helped with the intake process of children and youth in to the orphanage as well as the adoption process in Ecuador, family reunification and other necessary steps for a child to leave the orphanage. The experience to work with social workers in Ecuador offered me a way to observe the similarities and differences in social work between different countries, share my skills and to grow professionally as a social worker.

Advice

- Go outside of your comfort zone, these adventures provide the greatest learning opportunities
- Try not to compare yourself to other volunteers, every experience is different and beautiful in its own way
- Know your limits
- Love yourself