

Serving the Homeless Population in Ecuador

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Ecuador

Ecuador is a country in the northwest of South America. The most common languages are Spanish and Kichwa. The majority of people are mestizos (mix of European and indigenous), followed by indigenous, then European descent. 98% of Ecuador's people are Catholic (Source: A Broader View orientation guide).

In the capital city, Quito, there are areas that are wealthy with lots of businesspeople. There are other areas, such as the historic center, that face more poverty and homelessness.

Ecuador is home to the Galapagos islands, as well as mountains, coast, and jungles. Quito is in the mountains.

Pedernales, Manabi, Ecuador

I also had the opportunity to spend 4 days in Pedernales, a city on the coast that suffered a massive earthquake in April. Most of the homeless there live with their families in communities of tents along the ocean. They became homeless due to the earthquake. They taught me a lot about hope and resilience and re-building a community after so much has been lost.

Project Information

I went to Ecuador to study interventions that are used there to serve the homeless population and to bring back skills to be used with the homeless in the U.S. I spent 1 week with homeless victims of an earthquake on the coast assisting in providing medical care and 2 weeks working in a shelter in Quito. I stayed with a local host family who helped me learn more Ecuadorian culture and practice Spanish.

Agency/ Community Partner

I volunteered for the agency Toca de Asis, which is a Catholic shelter run by monks. There is also a social worker, 2 psychologists, a nurse, and other staff and volunteers. 3 days a week, they hold a lunch where people who live in the street can come and eat for free and take part in a therapy group. People can also live at the shelter if they are trying to get sober.

Outcomes

Those who had the best mental health were those who had a strong sense of community, patriotism, and faith.

Acceptance and responsibility for substance use enhances motivation for change.

As part of this project, I am completing a work about this experience in my Seelio portfolio.



Skills Utilized/Developed

- Group facilitation
- Motivational interviewing
- Understanding of the welfare system in Ecuador

Classroom Connections

SW 521: Individual Practice with Individuals and Families

This class prepared me to understand biopsychosocials, to run groups, and to understand interventions that motivate change such as motivational interviewing.

Lessons Learned

- Talk less, listen more. I was worried about leading groups with my limited language skills, but found I didn't have to say much. My clients had a lot to say and were happy to have someone to listen.
- Strengths can be found in anyone's situation.

Career Connections

My future career goals include working with the homeless and cross-cultural populations. This project gave me more experience with both of those populations.

Many of the men at the shelter come from indigenous backgrounds and taught me about that culture. I was able to think critically and compare and contrast this culture with Native Americans in the U.S., which is the population I work with at my internship.

Because of this project, I am considering joining the Peace Corps in Ecuador after graduation.

Advice

Go in with an open mind. Your project may end up being different than what you planned, and it may end up being more rewarding and educational than your original idea. Go with it!

Don't be afraid to explore by yourself and start up conversations with people. You never know who could become a friend.

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