



# Youth Development in Costa Rica

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## Cartago, Costa Rica

Home to almost 5 million people, Costa Rica is nestled in Central America between Nicaragua and Panama. Costa Rica is one of twenty countries with the greatest biodiversity in the world, and protected national parks and reserves cover over 25% of the country. 76% of Costa Ricans identify as Roman Catholic, and Catholicism plays an important role in culture and daily life, especially in Cartago. Every August, about 2.5 million people make a pilgrimage to Cartago's cathedral, La Basilica de Nuestra Señora de Los Angeles.

## Escuela San Blas, Cartago

Escuela San Blas is the elementary school in which I was placed for thirteen weeks. I worked with students from preschool to sixth grade. Many students in the San Blas community came from a low socioeconomic background. Limited services were available to combat gender inequality and promote holistic health, and physical education is not offered at the school. The school is full of passionate staff, and there are many positive leaders among the youth.

## Global Field Placement

My global field placement was at Escuela San Blas through the organization Cross Cultural Solutions in Cartago, Costa Rica. My work helped the school meet requirements for the national Convivir initiative from the Ministry of Public Education, which requires schools to foster inclusion. I had the privilege of engaging in a variety of community organizing roles and participating in interdisciplinary collaboration.

## Outcomes

- Developed and implemented a program that uses soccer to address social issues, following the Football3 model
- Improved holistic health, gender equality, and self-efficacy among the soccer program participants
- Implemented individual and classroom-based experiential interventions to address behavioral and emotional challenges
- Led interactive community workshops on parenting and restorative justice

## Skills Developed

Through this placement, I enhanced my skills in the following:

- Program development
- Restorative justice practices
- Culturally and ethically appropriate use of assertiveness
- Community outreach

## Lessons Learned

- Youth voice is a powerful force, and young people have a great deal to offer when we give them a chance to help guide their own experiences.
- It is important to have realistic expectations, especially when many needs are visible. Embrace mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Sustainability and local leadership is crucial. Program development should be intentional so that the community is left with the tools, capacities, and leaders to continue the work.

## Classroom Connections

SW530 Social Work & Sport showed me a variety of ways to use sport to meet client needs and goals. This course gave me resources to combine my passions and prepared me to develop the soccer program. SW799 Adventure Therapy taught me how I can use activities to engage and empower youth. I used tools and experiences from this course to intentionally craft sessions in classrooms and on the soccer field.

## Career Connections

I will carry these field experiences and lessons into my future career. My goal is to work in Latin America, using sport as an avenue for youth development to create sustainable, locally led opportunities.

## Advice

- Cultivate a network of people in-country that you can collaborate with, receive feedback from, and who can support you. Reach out to local organizations who are doing similar work so you can learn more about their approaches.
- Look for outside-the-box opportunities to learn about your community and the local culture.

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