

## Los Chiles, Alajuela



Los Chiles has a population of about 16,000. It is 6km from Nicaragua classifying it as a border town. Los Chiles is considered a semi-urban town and the hub for major access to governmental, medical, financial, educational, and transportation resources. The main job source for locals are the pineapple, sugar cane, and yucca fields in the zone. The majority of professionals working in the community come from other places in the country. Not all of Los Chiles counts with potable water, electricity, trash services and paved roads.

## Youth in Los Chiles



Youth have a negative reputation among adults in the community and are often referred to as "vagos" (hoodlums)

Lack of:

Vision	Dreams	Interest	Direction
Commitment	Values		Identity
Dedication	Alliances		Opportunities

(Responses from adults in Los Chiles during my assessment.)

## Youth Development Framework

### Goal 1: Healthy Foundations

- Life Skills and Leadership Development
- Sexual and Reproductive Health and Gender
- Physical Activities, Arts and Recreation

### Goal 2: Youth Support

- Parent support for youth
- Support for service providers working with youth

## Primary Projects

-Centro Tecnico Profesional Los Chiles (Technical High School)

Counterparts: School Counselors, Science teacher, and English teacher

Partners: Ministry of Health (social worker and psychologist) + PANI (Child Protective Services)

- Elementary School to High School transition support for 7<sup>th</sup> graders
- Healthy Sexual Knowledge and Behaviors Workshop for 9<sup>th</sup> graders
- Career Week & Goal Setting workshop for seniors



- English Clubs & English Festivals

-CENCINAI (Government Child Care Center)

Partners: CENCINAI + CINDEA (Adult Night School)

- Training for new teachers
- Creation of the Night CENCINAI for parents attaining their GED at night school.

-INA (Community College)

Counterparts: English course graduates

- Trained previous English students to become teachers for new students
- After school tutoring

-Guias & Scouts (Boys & Girls Scouts)

Partners: Community members



## Secondary Projects

-Cultural Exchange

- African & Haitian friends in Los Chiles
- Language practice through cultural exchange

Partners: English teachers + students

- Spanish Class

Partners: University student studying to be a Spanish Professor + Catholic Church



- Workshops with Nicaraguan immigrant women in a rural community

Partners: Ministry of Culture + Institute for Women's Rights + Department of Human Services



- Mentoring University Students

## Lessons Learned

- Connections with people are everything and the most worthwhile piece of this experience.
- Maintaining an open mind and open heart is crucial
- Patience and flexibility are required
- "Success" has many definitions
- Solitude is not so scary

## Skills Developed

I learned how to:

- Complete a Community and Sector Assessment for Awareness and Action
- Facilitate collaborations among institutions for better delivery of services
- Organize a community for cooperation on common goals

## Advice

### No Expectations

The Peace Corps experience is a roller coaster. If you come in with no expectations you have a greater chance of not being disappointed and better adapting to what is presented to you no matter what it is.

### Meet your community where they are

As new volunteers we come eager and ready to jump into action, but it is important to go at your community's pace for consistent participation and a possibility of sustainability.

### Sustainable development takes time

Two years of service may seem like a long time, but in terms of development it is not. Coming to terms with the fact that we may not see the fruits of the seeds we plant does not mean there were no successes.



## Classroom Connections

SW605 Infant and Child Development and Behavior  
 SW648 Issues in Global Social Work Practice  
 SW715 Adventure Therapy  
 SW521 IP with Individuals, Families, and Small Groups  
 SW522 Basic Social work Research

## Career Connections

This experience has solidified my desire to work with immigrant and refugee populations in local (U.S.) and international settings.

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