

Dear W4P donors:

Thanks to your contribution to my Witness for Peace teen delegation, I just had the best two weeks of my life. No joke. I met sixteen other teens from around the country, all of whom had different cultural backgrounds, personalities, religious and political views. Through our experiences, games, songs, and time together, we all bonded as a group and became friends. At the main hostel we stayed at in Managua, Cepad, we learned about the history of U.S. and Nicaragua relations and trade agreements. During the day, we went in our big van with our driver, Luis, and met with different Nicaraguan community activists, economists, environmentalists, and volunteer health coordinators.



At the girls' home of Los Quinchos

We visited La Chureca, Managua's municipal dump, where people and animals look through the trash for food. We went to Los Quinchos, an awesome organization that takes in street kids who have been sniffing glue and cares for them until they're eighteen. We visited the U.S. Embassy to ask some questions about what we had been learning about, like CAFTA, subsidies to U.S. Farmers and why we support a dictator like Daniel Ortega, Nicaragua's current president. We stopped by a fair trade store and Nueva Vida, a women's sewing co-op.

We each stayed with an urban host family for three days with another teen from the delegation. My host mom, Xiomara, worked with a volunteer organization that provided pregnant farm animals to poor Nicaraguans and had them pass on the babies to the next family. The first night there was one of the best nights of the trip, because there were dance parties for the anniversary of the Revolution (July 19th) going on in every neighborhood. We all came out with our host families and danced to the blaring music and strobe lights with the little children, who wanted to talk to us and hug us even though they had just met us. During the urban stay, we also went to the plaza for revolutionary festivities, hiked in a nature preserve, and had a "concert" of Nicaraguan music with our host families at the Witness for Peace house, where some of the leaders of our delegation live.

Then we had our three day rural home stay in Ramon Garcia, which is about four hours from Managua, in the mountains. Again we each stayed with one other teen in a home. My host mom, Daisy, was a leader in the Christian community there as well as an excellent cook. My host dad, Julio, farmed corn and beans, and when I talked to him I learned that he had only gone through third grade and that he helped people in the community learn how to write their signature. We helped plant some mango trees by a school, moved some rocks to fill potholes, took a tour of a farm, learned about the community's long struggle for access to clean water, and went to a religious service and a cultural dance night.

At the end of the trip, we stayed at the Laguna de Apoyo, which was possibly the most beautiful place I've ever been. There we processed all that we had learned and experienced together and made an action plan for what we wanted to do upon returning to the United States. We decided that we would create the "ripple effect" by encouraging others to go, by telling our stories through blogs, Facebook, letters to government representatives, church bulletins and letters to the editor in our local newspapers. We plan to visit Congress in October to explain what we have witnessed firsthand and to question some of the policies of the U.S. that we learned about. The Raleigh delegates also hope to meet with David Price sometime in August.

So what are some of the things I learned during this delegation? I learned that I don't get homesick easily, that I love being surrounded by teens and activities with a purpose all the time, that I love seeing new places and meeting new people who care enough to change the reality of the world that they live in. (These things convinced me 100% that I do want to take a gap year after high school to be an exchange student!) I learned that the U.S. is certainly not always the "good guy". I learned that we, as educated citizens of the currently most powerful country in the world, have more power to work for justice than most of us realize. I also learned that that apathy is the biggest obstacle we have to overcome in the struggle for justice.

Again, thank you, thank you, thank you for giving me this opportunity to have this experience and come home inspired, informed, confident, and a little more world-savvy than when I left. Truly, those were the best two weeks of my life, and without your incredible generosity (even though most of you have never met me!), it might not have happened.

God bless you,
Colleen Kane



My rural homestay family



Laguna de Apoyo



The kitchen at my rural homestay house



A delicious breakfast in the rural homestay



Beautiful landscape in Ramon Garcia



At the boys' home of Los Quinchos