

Master of Arts in Counseling Students Train Guatemalan Orphanage Workers

Written by Sally Waller



While teaching the Multicultural Perspectives class in the Master of Arts in Counseling (MAC) program, Dr. Shannon Wolf, who has spent time living overseas as a missionary herself, taught her students the best and most practical ways of counseling cross-culturally.

However, she also wanted the opportunity for them to grasp the information first-hand.

Consequently, DBU has had an on-going partnership with Buckner International-sponsored orphanages, and in the spring of last year, 15 undergraduate students, faculty, and staff were planning DBU's seventh trip to Guatemala with Buckner International. Although there have been numerous trips in the past, never has there been the intentional inclusion of graduate-level students.

During their week in Xela, Guatemala, DBU students developed a Vacation Bible School program that centered on the theme of the Fruit of the Spirit. Different activities, including Bible story time, recreation, and crafts, all focused on sharing the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control found in Christ.

"It was amazing to spend time loving on these kids who don't get very many hugs, touches, or words of encouragement," expressed Christy Gandy, DBU director of global missions and also leader of the trip. "To see their faces light up with joy when we walked in was always so special. It was amazing how quickly they would attach themselves to us."

While Dr. Wolf and her three MAC students spent a majority of their time in the same places as the other DBU students and with the same goal of expressing divine love, they were also able to incorporate what they had been learning in the classroom.

Besides training nannies in orphanages, a team also taught teachers in rural schools and pastors in local churches on proper attending





skills with children and ways to psychologically understand the needs of those they care for.

Dr. Wolf described witnessing many “light bulb” moments with her students during their trip to Guatemala—moments where theories and terms collided with faith and gave their studies a new purpose.

A required class about Multicultural Perspectives was no longer just a class, but it was a part of the biblical wisdom that expresses, *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”* (James 1:27, NIV). Faith and learning go hand-in-hand.

In the orphanage where the students served, the nannies were often outnumbered with over 70 children to only three nannies. Many of the children they deal with on a day-to-day basis are starved for attention, which puts an enormous amount of physical and emotional demands on the women who care for them.

“The nannies were very appreciative of the time we spent with them and seemed genuinely concerned with the welfare of the children they were responsible for,” explained MAC student Lori Ryan, who went on the trip. *“They made the comment that people always come to take care of the children, but nobody had ever helped them before. I think no matter what culture someone is a part of they always need to feel valued and appreciated.”*

Outside of the four walls of a classroom and surrounded by people with real and pressing needs, the MAC students shared practical and step-by-step methods to aid hurting people. However, they also shared their belief that the greatest way to love and the wisest way to care for others is through the strength of the Father, the example of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

“I can’t imagine counseling without God,” stated Dr. Wolf, *“It’s not science on one side and faith on the other side. Science is the what, but faith is the how.”*

The trip was not about receiving a grade or passing an exam, but it was about learning to help people, which is the purpose of service-learning. Service-learning is taking head knowledge, information that is absorbed from textbooks and classrooms, and turning it into a heart knowledge that has the potential to change lives.

“The learning experience in Guatemala was like no other. Nothing compares to the first-hand experience of being in the shoes of others,” MAC student Erika Wiegand stated. *“All these experiences further advanced my understanding of multicultural perspectives in counseling in a way that could not have been achieved in only the classroom. For that reason, I am greatly appreciative of the opportunity to have been a part of the trip.”*