

### **MARCH 3 UPDATE SENT FROM SENOR FITE:**

Dear parents of Mexico trip participants,

It is my pleasure to inform you that all is well in Monterrey. Probably the most challenging part of the trip was our lengthy checkin in Dayton. After that a great team of chaperones helped your students through our layover in Dallas, filling out visa applications and getting through customs. I have been complimented repeatedly on the good behavior of our group. Immigrations and customs in Monterrey was very welcoming and accommodating as we brought our 150+ pieces of luggage and carryon's through. After an interesting ride through the beautiful city of Monterrey, we unloaded a huge pile of donations in the main room at the LDM campus, were taken on a tour of the Hope Program buildings, were treated to a hamburger grill out (with lots of jalapeños of course), and then had an orientation to the Back2Back approach to orphan care. After the debriefing time, we were anxious for a well-deserved night of rest.

Sunday had the seventh graders headed out to eventually meet with children of the Manantial de Amor (Fountain of Love) children's home -- to be referred to as MdL for a day of fun. They first went to a church service conducted entirely in Spanish. There was lots of singing and opportunity to praise God for two hours. They then went to a fun center known as Jump-olin where they met the other children's group. There was a long slide, a video arcade and lots of trampolines. Adults were amazed at children who could actually jump for four straight hours. The best thing was learning to communicate with kids with words, body language and the language of love.

The eighth grade headed to church at Cristo el Camino where they met with children and youth from ERJ (El Retiro Juvenil) children's home. 2 CHCA'ers were paired with a child to do a neighborhood canvass to invite people to church. Then we piled into some vans and headed back to the ERJ campus for lunch, a tour and some play time with the kids. We were then taken with some of the kids to a beautiful historical museum nearby and then up to a lookout point for an overview of the city with a statue of the first president of Mexican descent Benito Juarez and a cross on the highest point. One chaperone was touched by being led around by the hand by a little girl by the name of Lidia. Afterwards we headed back to ERJ for more time playing with the kids. Particularly popular was the soccer court and the goats. It is always amazing to see the instant bonding between our students and the children of the "Casa Hogar".

Both groups will be focusing on one home for most of the week. Our evening ended together with a round the circle "picture of the day" sharing time and a dramatic presentation by the Hope Program youth and a promotion of their upcoming missions trip to Haiti. Thanks for your prayers and your confidence as we share this life-changing experience with your students.

Mike Fite Spanish Teacher

### **MARCH 4 UPDATE SENT FROM SENOR FITE:**

Dear parents of Mexico trip participants,

Greetings from beautiful Monterrey Mexico nestled in a valley between two ranges of mountains. What a great experience for all to enjoy this amazing display of God's handiwork each day. Monday evening was filled with reports of great experiences and "pictures of the day" of lives being touched as we dedicate ourselves to serving the orphaned of Monterrey Mexico. We are impacted by the selfless dedication of the workers in the "casas hogares" that Back2Back gives support to. It is a blessing to in some way lighten their load and encourage them that they are not alone in their work.

Monday was cold and drizzly, but it didn't in any way dampen the spirit of our students and chaperones. The seventh grade began their day filling balloons for a birthday party they would throw for three children of the MdA children's home. They kids were delighted with the traditional balloon stomping game. The group enjoyed a tour of the facility, lunch with the children and then escorted them by bus to their school. This really builds up the children before their peers. Then the group headed out to Back2Back's new Dream facility which is under construction. This project will eventually replace the Manantial de Amor location and place the children in a more family style environment in apartments with smaller groups of children and with the same house parent for as long as they need to be there. Students and adults carried blocks to help move the day's construction along.

The eighth grade returned to ERJ (El Retiro Juvenil) for a day of hard work, also loaded with Legos, games and enthusiasm. We divided into work teams and made great progress in laying down tires and filling them with rocks and dirt for a retaining wall to extend the playground area. Another team did some base coat painting in a new building. Still another team took to some sledge hammers with safety goggles and hard hats, thoroughly enjoying an opportunity to do some demolition work. We were impressed by our leader Oscar who almost single-handedly took out a cement pillar. Our group put in nearly 4

hours of work and then spent some time playing games and introducing the kids to a big supply of Legos. I am happy to say that all worked without complaint and glad to serve.

Both groups returned quite tired but satisfied. It all came out during debriefing time where we shared how our perspective on God, self and others had changed that day. The focus for visiting groups is EXPERIENCE - REFLECTION - CHANGE - ACTION. The evening ended with some sadness as chaperone Jay Slouffman (father of seventh grader Alicia) learned of death of his father. With his permission I am asking for your prayers on behalf of his family. Que Dios los bendiga. To be continued soon.

Mike Fite Spanish Teacher

#### **MARCH 5 UPDATE SENT FROM SENOR FITE:**

Dear parents of Mexico trip participants,

Greetings once again from Monterrey, the world's largest cement producer we are told. We were concerned that we were in for another cold, cloudy day, but the sun eventually came out and warmed things up some, although the wind had quite a chill.

Both groups got a respite from the hard work duties of previous days. The seventh grade headed to ERJ (el Retiro Juvenil) to experience their team building program through their high ropes course. There were only a few children at the home at this time since most were in school. This course is actually an income generator for the home, and our participation benefited them financially as well. By the time they finished, they were able to spend a little time with the kids playing some soccer.

The eighth grade met a group of people from a government sponsored housing project called Cadereyta at the "Jumpolin" recreation center for a few hours of fun with a great group of youth and adults. We helped these friends enjoy an experience they would otherwise never have had. But much more important, as their pastor said, we fulfilled the Scriptures in Psalm 133 which say "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity." It took a while for both groups to get over their initial shyness, but soon it was just a group of young people having a great time together. After sharing a snack time, we headed out to Cadereyta to visit the church and hear a devotional from Pastor Jose Angel Deloris, a man who has had a tremendous impact on this community, holding families and marriages together, giving people who were former shanty town dwellers a chance for a normal life. We have been taught that poverty exists at five levels -- SPIRITUAL, PHYSICAL, EDUCATIONAL, EMOTIONAL and SOCIAL. Back2Back attempts to minister to people in all five areas. The pastor challenged Mexican and American youth alike to embrace the idea early in life that God has a plan and purpose for their life. The church in that area is a testimony to the generosity of several groups and churches from the Cincinnati area.

After this, both groups ate dinner at the ever popular "Pollo Loco" ( the crazy chicken), lots of grilled chicken, tortillas, a salsa bar and soft drinks. It's always a high point for the kids. The evening ended with a time of Spanish praise and worship with a worship team composed of various Back2Back staff and resident students. Wednesday will be another big work day. We are looking forward to making progress on our projects. Our journey continues. . . .

Mike Fite Spanish Teacher

#### **MARCH 6 UPDATE SENT FROM SENOR FITE:**

Dear parents of Mexico trip participants,

Greetings once again from Monterrey, the world's largest cement producer we are told. We were concerned that we were in for another cold, cloudy day, but the sun eventually came out and warmed things up some, although the wind had quite a chill.

It is Thursday morning, the skies are clear and the rising sun is reflecting off the beautiful Sierra Madre range seen from the front porch of the LDM (Lugar de Misericordia - Place of Mercy) building. This is the last full day of work and play with the orphans of Monterrey and surrounding area. One chaperone last night during our time of debriefing declared, "I feel like the luckiest person on earth to be here this week." This will be my last communication to you before we make our way back to the USA tomorrow. Again, thanks for entrusting us with your children for this life changing, perspective changing experience.

Our children and adults worked hard yesterday. The seventh grade headed out to the Dream project construction site to help speed up progress for a day. One of our chaperones calculated the total weight of the 2500 cement blocks our group carried to the ceiling that was being constructed at 62,500 pounds, 28 metric tons, 3,150 pounds per person. Good work guys -- certainly above and beyond the call of duty! Some also dug holes for fence posts, often having to break through rock. Their leader Cheque was amazed at the progress and that the group also helped them avoid a fine for having building material lying around for too long. He also was impressed that all was done without a word of complaint - with a great spirit.

The eighth grade returned to ERJ and began the day playing games and building with Legos with the children as they trickled into the dining hall having gotten ready for school. Some of the group headed down the hill to the soccer court for an intense everyone can play who wants to play kind of game - a great mixer - Mexicans and Americans on both teams. After a delicious lunch of soft tacos with fillings that were new to most, including napolitos (cactus leaf) the group went straight to work for the afternoon. We continued demolition work, hauling soil and construction debris as filler to the retaining wall project, painting the new library building and cleaning some chicken coop stalls. That last job included chasing down the chickens that had been released in the process. I'll let you create your own mental image of that event. Mrs. Koopman totally distinguished herself as the chicken catching queen with a total of six.

After all the work everyone headed back to campus for a delicious meal prepared by former Hope Program resident and now chef Angel. Everyone was ready to share amazing moments and how their perspectives on God, self and others are being transformed during debriefing time. Today we will return to our projects and finish what we began to the best of our ability. This evening all of us will head over to the Casa Hogar Douglas to share a meal from "El Pollo Loco" as well as a time of worship in their chapel. For some of our returning travelers, they will be renewing friendships with the children. The kids are very excited. Prayer for a smooth trip home. See you in Dayton tomorrow night at 11:05.

Mike Fite Spanish Teacher