

Mexico Vision Trip

Team Members: Jeanne Bennett, Kelly Crigler, Jim Gross, Dana Hadigian, Paula Hemphill, Sue Kurnett, Susan Simmons, Melissa Reece

Team Leader: MaryAnn Osborn

Donor Liaison: Barbara Ocampo

Bus Driver: Alejandro

DAY 1 – August 12, 2013

We were picked up at the airport. Everyone and their things made it; a minor miracle in the world of travel. We traveled to lunch at Little Italy in San Diego. I ordered pizza—not realizing we could have fed a small village on the pizzas there.

We crossed the border into Mexico with virtually no complications. We were stopped, the border guard popped his head into our van and then we were on our way. No check of passports or anything. Welcome to Mexico!!!!

During our drive Barbara explained that most of the people living in Tijuana got stranded here. They came in hopes of easily crossing the border into the US. It wasn't as easy as they had hoped it would be. And now many of them are stuck. If they cross illegally and get caught that's it. They're done. No chance of getting into the USA legally after that.

Many homeless migrants would live by the "river" which is now totally dry. She said many of them would be hit trying to cross the freeway. We saw it nearly happen to us as we were driving to the border park. A man slipped between the bars and fencing that is designed to keep the pedestrians off of the freeway. He just went for it. Running full speed. Hoping not to be hit. A few of us were closing our eyes. Hoping he wouldn't be hit. He made it across, but I understand how many are hit. It's a freeway; pretty quick moving highway.

We stopped at the wall. So many sad things written there. Memorials of people who had tried to cross into the US. The most striking thing is probably the art at the top: a husband, wife, and child all holding onto balloons hoping the balloons will carry them over the wall. This was the first time I



was ever really faced with the reality of a world with borders and what that means for those living on the other side of the fence. MaryAnn said, "It makes you wonder... is this the way it's supposed to be... imagine a world without borders."

DAY TWO

Driver: Miguel

This morning I began my accidental journey of adventurous eating in Mexico. I believe my exact words were, "Oh, good. I've found another thing I don't like!" as I was chewing on what I thought was a yellow pepper. Turns out it was as far from a yellow pepper as you can get, "Chicharrones," which, in our native English tongue, translates to "pig skin." For an even better explanation, picture Barbara, our Donor Liaison, saying "pork" as she stroked the skin of her arm. Yeah. That was breakfast.

We traveled to the ADP Pedregal de Santa Julia. This was the first ADP in Tijuana. We went to the community center. A lot of the people in this area come from the southern states of Mexico. Barbara said it “used to be and dumpster and empty” but now it’s urbanized.

While there we met Griselda. She was a volunteer and now she is a WV employee. She says it is a blessing to do what she loves and be paid to do it. Her work brings her great joy. She’s a dedicated worker—working from very early in the morning until late at night.

Next we met Marisol, another volunteer, who has become an employee.

We learned from these ladies and their amazing volunteers that in Mexico education is public, but that doesn’t mean it’s free. One of the women said it costs about \$120 pesos per month. Because of these fees many children are uneducated. They cannot read or even write their names. World Vision has created workshops to teach them reading, writing, and math.

We were there during a lesson and even attempted to do the lessons ourselves.

The teacher, Monsay, encouraged the children by explaining that it is very important for them to read at least 15 minutes a day. We then had a reading lesson about sea turtles (Cowama in espanol). The lesson was designed to teach them about endangered animals, but it also tested their comprehension. Since the Cowama is also the name of an alcoholic drink they took the opportunity to have a mini lesson about addiction/drug & alcohol abuse.

Next Marisol did the penmanship/spelling by using words from the story—further reinforcing what they’d just learned. They traded papers with their classmates and corrected each other’s work.



Next we did LONG multiplication. This is when Susan Simmons really showed off her homeschooling prowess. And I made my Dad (my home school math teacher) cry in shame. Let’s just say I changed numbers mid-problem. Melissa and I bonded over the fact that we’ve forgotten an embarrassing amount of math knowledge.

I sat between Alexis (one of the twins) and Samantha.

The tables were then rearranged; boys on one end, girls on the other. We did a piñata project. The little girls were making Hello Kitty piñatas, but all I could say was “gato”, and I was told “no.” Apparently it was not a cat but rather “Hello Kitty.” The boys were making Cars. The piñata crafts teach the children to recycle—they used items they found, the project also keeps the kids off of the street because they have something to do, it refines their fine motor skills, and it teaches microenterprise. Piñatas are a big deal in Mexico, and can be sold at market.



In this program there are about 350 registered children, 200 of them are sponsored.

Not a lot of men volunteer in the community because they are working.

Barbara told me that children in Tijuana will sometimes be forced to work at the age of 6 or 7 because their families are in such bad financial situations.

Jim handed out school supplies here.



After we left this community we drove to Marisol's mother's home. It was at the very top of a steep hill. Up the tire steps to the fenced in front porch area. The children were doing a drug prevention/awareness workshop and we got to hear their presentations.

Team 1:

Lionel – age 10

Juan Antonio – age 10

Louisa Maria – age 11

Christian – age 9

Dulsa – age 9

They presented about cocaine and the risks of using

Team 2:

Maria – age 13

Maria – age 11

Lizbeth – age 11

Milda Inez – age 12

Karina – age 13

Shared about alcohol and tobacco

Team 3:

Litze – age 12

Rebecca – age 12

Michelle – age 13

Heydy – age 9

Juliana – age 6

Spoke to us about Marijuana

Barbara expressed to us that kids as young as 6 years old are exposed to hard drugs in their homes. A child once told her he saw his aunt doing “something white like sugar.” Because of this they educate them very young so that they are aware that drugs are bad.

After the workshop we helped the kids build Bon Bon Popsicles. Sue was given a delicious Corazon to eat, which she did with a big smile on her face.

We were then fed perhaps the most amazing meal ever. Tostadas: baked tortillas, smashed beans, shredded beef, salsa, cheese, lettuce, onions soaks in lime, and hot salsa. We got to see the kitchen and the beautiful ladies who cooked for us.

Sue gave out candy to the kiddos there.



We got to climb down the Cliffside tire stairs. I went first. It was far more terrifying going down than up! Everyone made it down in one piece. What really astonished me were the kids... they waved goodbye for so long. Every time I turned around they were still waving. We couldn't help but wave back. It was like a scene out of a movie. Sad, but so beautiful. Love lives on that little hillside. And it waves goodbye even after you stop looking back.

Next we traveled to Mary's house. She runs a preschool out of her home because in this ADP there are no WV buildings. The projects are run out of people's homes. We met her husband outside. He was working on construction. We had to climb down some rickety steep steps without a railing. Then we stepped into a beautiful loft area and down the concrete spiral staircase to the room the children do their lessons.

We walked in the room and there were sweet little kiddos sitting quietly at their little person tables doing projects.

We met Yamilet who is a sponsored child and her mother. We learned how access to this school has helped her advance and develop. Barbara says she is one of their “stars.”

We did a shape exercise with the kiddos. It turned out to be a real struggle for us to remember all the shapes: Triangulo, Cuadrado, Circulo, and rectangulo (but that's just me guessing again... I could be way off base). We had to tell them the name of the shapes; they would draw them, cut them out, and then match up with others with the same shape. I worked with Gabby.



Next we did some puppet shows for them. We each had a puppet, would show the kids, they would guess the animal, and then we would all make the sound. I was the duck. And I know Sue was the burro. I can't remember what everyone else was.

The next puppet show was about Camilla and the cat. Here's the cast & crew of that production:

Camilla: Melissa
Cat (which looked like Casper the friendly ghost): Paula
Dad: Jim
Grandmother/Blue Fairy: Sue
Brother: Susan
Mother: Dana

The point of the puppet show was to teach children to communicate with their parents, ask questions and get things clarified.

This program, which was designed for children ages 0-5 yrs old, is a pilot program.

We learned here that money is received in their national office. Needs of the communities are identified by staff and volunteers on the ground in the communities. They plan the activities for the year. Everything is budgeted and budget is approved/disbursed through the national office. Unsponsored kids still have access to the programs.

We also learned that sometimes new moms fear bringing their kids to WV because they are afraid the kids will be kidnapped.

Out of 100 kids, 10 will get letters or birthday cards. But even though it is sad they are still benefiting from child sponsorship. One of the mothers there was clearly upset that her child has not received letters. Our hearts all broke a little bit.

MaryAnn gave out a bubble Machine.

Dana gave play dough.

We went to Mole Restaurant across the circle from our hotel. Jim got the cactus. We debriefed and talked about how we can present sponsorship in a way that is accurate and not misleading. Some of the things we learned today challenge some of the things we've been saying. We need to be careful with our language and word choice.



DAY THREE

Driver: Miguel

We went to the Community Center that overlooked the gorgeous rolling hills on all sides. We were there to see the 3-5 year program. There we met:

Brenda – a volunteer for 6 years. She volunteers for the 13-18 year old group.

Esther – Volunteer 4-5 years, Lizbeth’s mom. She is flattered, blessed and happy. She’s amazed at the transformation in her daughter.

Enora – part of the teenage group

Lizbeth – age 13 – a sponsored child who is part of the teenage group. She was so shy that she would barely speak to her mother, and especially never to strangers. She began attending workshops 3 years ago. She learned handcrafts like piggy banks and manicure skills. She would go to workshops such as AIDS prevention and detection. Once she came to the workshops she began to have more confidence. She feels more trust and can do things she could never do before—like speaking to us! She feels good because she can share in this safe place. She learned to trust herself and others. She has learned skills. She is also learning about how World Vision supports other. She’s also received scholarships for uniforms, etc. Brenda, a volunteer, said Lizbeth was so shy she would hide. But in time became more open. She will now even dance at celebrations. Every day she is more confident. She will raise her hand and participate.

Mayra – She is a coordinator for the 0-5 group. She has been with World Vision for five years. She is kindness. She radiates love to everyone and I was so drawn to her beautiful personality.

Lopita – age 17 – learned how to do manicures at a workshop. Now she has a micro business in her house. She has gone through beauty school. Her prices start at \$50 pesos (about \$4US).

We met the children: Rafita, Abraham, Ulises, Dana, Jesus, Samantha, Gabi, Carlos, Raul, Rafeal, another Jesus (aka Chewey), Daniel. Sue wants to sponsor Daniel!

World Vision evaluates the children in this area to see where they need development. The areas they are looking at are: visual, auditory, cognitive, motor skills, and self- esteem.

Their school year ends around July. At the end of the school year they reassess everyone and their progress. They showed us the evaluation form they use, but I did not get a good look at it. During the school year they have classes 3 times a week for 2 hours a day. During the summer break it’s just once a week.

Every child has the opportunity to attend these classes—whether they are in the program or not.

It is not a requirement of the sponsorship program that the children attend the workshops, but there is a commitment requirement for attendance in the workshops.

The children here are sponsored through the US and Mexico.

This program is not yet officially recognized by the government, so they cannot give an official documentation of education. They do, however, provide the child’s file to the school. WV is partnering with the community schools to make everything official/validate the education through the schools.



In Mexico 3 years of preschool is normal/“required”. Most children only get the last year though. This workshop is designed to fill that gap so the children are not behind when they do finally get to school. Here we were told that school costs about \$2.00 US per week per child and they have to have uniforms. For each piece of the uniform is costs 350 pesos (new), 100 pesos (used). There are also school fees. The fees vary by grade and are not mandated by the government. Each school sets their own fee schedule.

The schools in this community are not professional. The staff/teachers have some training, but they are not professional educators. There are only 2 government schools in this community.

The breakdown of registered/sponsored children in this ADP are:

# of children	age range
395	0-5
900	6-12
300	13-18

The mom’s wanted us to know that the support of the children and education mean so much to them. The community interaction between the children also means a lot to them.

We then had time to color with the children. I sat with Carlos, Ulises, Jesus (Not Chewy), Samantha, and Dana. Carlos sat right beside me. He’s really great at coloring inside the lines and taking non-verbal coloring instructions.



Next we played with toys. Carlos is not good at sharing. I spent the next 30 minutes stealing toys out of the bins Carlos was hoarding and sneaking them to Ulises and Jesus. Inevitably Carlos would steal them back and then I would steal them back. Rinse. Repeat. For 30 minutes with no way to tell him he has to share! Finally Barbara came back... I asked her to teach me how to tell the kids to share, and God bless her, she tried. After three times of me saying whatever it was she was trying to teach me incorrectly she just asked me “Who is not sharing?” Under the bus Carlos went. I heard

her drop my name a few times. It was a long lecture. Finally she got to the end and Carlos asked her “Who is Paula?” (with a slight touch of disdain, I might add). Under the bus I went. I guess it was only fair. He gave me a look. But he did start sharing. And we were friends again.

Next we got to teach the kids to lace these plastic sneakers. It’s amazing what you can teach a 4 year old non-verbally. Carlos did pretty well. I kinda fell in love with the non-sharing little trouble maker while I was helping him tie his laces.

During this time Jeanne and Kelly were meeting their sponsored children.



Next we were fed Mole, rice, and fresh tortillas overlooking the beautiful rolling hillsides. So much beauty and love in this place.

We said our goodbyes and left for an art district shopping excursion. Barbara was pretty amazing and bartered for us.

We debriefed at Caesar's. It's the place where the Caesar Salad was invented. It was pretty good. So, I got the "Salmon Manure" in the spirit of being adventurous, of course.

Later that night we had a team bible study. Notable quotes:

"Ministry is inconvenient, but if we want to see change we have to do something." – Melissa

"He knows how to fix it and it is going to get fixed." – Susan S (regarding the brokenness/suffering of our world)

"Sometimes we're homesick for the Father." – Jeanne

Suffering doesn't have the last word. LOVE WINS.

"I'm an optimist, but I want to shut out evil." – Susan S.

"Sometimes I get frustrated (about suffering) but if I knew the answers to these questions God wouldn't be God." – Jeanne

Hope frees us to live in joyous rebellion.

DAY FOUR

Driver: Jonathan

Today I got the "recipe" for the delicious energizing green juice I had been drinking at breakfast: Parsley, pineapple, cactus (nopal), celery, orange.

On the way to the van there was a hotel employee. His name is “Jonhatan.” It was so adorable that he felt the need to explain his aunt didn’t know how to spell the name properly and that his name is, sadly, spelled incorrectly.

We went to the community center with the playground today. There we met Mattie (one of Barbara’s Iron ladies). She was still there to host us even though her mother is in the hospital and her grandmother is near death. She said it would make her mother happy to be there with us. She is a community volunteer. She advocates with the government as well to get the community things they need. Like paved roads, schools, etc. She searched for education on human rights and now teaches a workshop on it.



We went inside and watched the children as they did the human rights matching exercise. Each child had one card. It had either a human right or a drawing on it. They exercise was to match the drawing with the appropriate right. Jim and I got to correct the children. They would come to us in pairs and show us their cards. If they were correct we’d say “cha-ching” and give them a high-five. If not, we’d pout and tell them “no” whilst shaking our heads. It was so much fun. The kids are so cute and we had no idea what the rights said, so we had no idea how far off they were 😊

Next each pair presented their rights. There were 29 of them and sadly I did not write them down.

After that exercise we went over to the summer closeout ceremony for the preschoolers. They got pillows with bible verse on them, candy, and bubbles from Susan S.

The volunteers there were Mary & Jose – they are proud because the children are able to read when they leave their program. They volunteer many hours a day to this program.

We went back to the play ground. Jim and Dana were playing soccer with a bunch of the kiddos. That was fun to see. Jim accused Melissa and me of being the “muy loco” ones. I guess I can’t argue. Melissa?

Dana made best friends with Kevin. He loved her so much! It was so special to see how attached he became and how he genuinely wanted to know about her family and life.



There were two girls, sisters, sitting very quietly. Alone. Watching the other kids play. That bothered me a little bit. So I walked over to them. I asked the first one’s name: Abril. I introduced myself: Paula. Then I thought I asked the next girl’s name. Over and over and over. And I was so confused because she kept telling me MY name. Finally Barbara came to my rescue. Turns out me and my new friend share a name. It also turns out my limited knowledge of the espanol is slightly better than my very intimidated and embarrassed self thought. I let the girls draw in my journal. And before I knew it they were gone... lost in the lunchtime chaos.

I got my beef quesadilla, jicama, guacamole, and salsa and I was on mission. I had to find my lonely girls again. And I did. Alone again. At the farthest table of the playground. I think I was about halfway across the playground when it really sunk in that they're not the popular ones. That was ok with me. I was never the cool one either. So I sat down and we ate pretty quietly—considering I really don't speak their language. So we just smiled at each other. Smiles. And love. Those things translate across any language barrier.

Kelly came over and sat with us. Next thing you know all the girls are around our table. Talking about TV shows and cute boys and things they like to do. I felt pretty good about that. The unpopular girls were now at the popular table. The girls ended up running off to play and I never got to say goodbye. Goodbyes are overrated though.

After that Kelly's sponsored girl, Isis, surprised her for a second visit. It was so nice to see that surprise unfold.

Next we went up to the community center and Melissa and I were cutting colored nylon string with a lighter. Let's be real, Melissa and the volunteer were the ones entrusted with the open flame. I just held my string over it for them.

Because I was so preoccupied, I missed almost all of the teenager's presentation. I did get their introductions and what they like about being part of the WV community, though:

Javier – 13 – handcrafts

Boswell – 12 – sharing with others

Arianna – 12 – loves to host groups. We learn. We love. We share.

Esmerelda – 15 – loves hosting visitors

Miriam – 17 – loves to work with teams and teens

Francisco – 13 – learned to be open with friends

Jose – 15 –likes to host visitors and share w/ friends (this is the trendy kid who could fit right in with the hipster Nashville fashion)

Josandres – 17 – teamwork, sharing, painting a wall

Saul – the goalie – he likes the bully & drug prevention workshop, fun with groups

Griselda – 13 – bully workshop & hosting visitors, peace walk w/ American teen group

Dikar – 17 – in their campaign they worked w/ USA team and presented a play regarding peace. They did this because community can be violent and they want to present a message of peace. The flags hanging in the playground were from that march. They also had a talent show w/ the USA teens. The theme was also peace. He and his friends are training to give a workshop on peace, prevention of STDs & teen pregnancy, drug prevention. He also went to Mexico City to a summit w/ other teens. He represented World Vision and Tijuana. There were people from the Dominican Republic, Peru, and Brazil there.

Next we were able to take part in the registration of 3 children into the sponsorship program.

Malu is 1 of 5 volunteers that exclusively handles sponsorship. Sometimes the children and parents come to the community center because they've heard of the sponsorship. Sometimes she and the other volunteers go door to door to invite the families to take part in the sponsorship program. That was what happened with these children.

In order to process sponsorship they must have 3 identifying documents: child's birth certificate, a utility bills showing home address, a parent ID.

Next 3 documents must be filled out:

1. Privacy release for photos and video
2. Child completes a pre written personal info letter (favorite color, things I like to do, etc)
3. General info form for the file.

Next they take photos and video. The photo must show the community, but no identifying images (car plates, street signs, addresses). Photo & video number are noted on the registration forms to prevent a mix up.

Children older than 12 cannot be enrolled in the registry due to age.

Each registration takes about 30 minutes.

During the registration many of us were given unwashed fruit by a few of the children. Melissa prayed for those of us that ate of it.



We had some time after the registrants completed the paperwork and left. So we debriefed with the ladies and were able to ask some questions. They explained how Christian witness works with each age range:

0-5 – they give out little things like the pillows that have bible verses, etc on them

6-12 – prayer at the beginning of functions, promote spirituality

13-18 – continue to promote spirituality

Also, there are local churches that do clubs, share space and supplies, and have that type of partnership with World Vision.

The ladies' dreams:

Mattie – dreams to make the 0-5 program recognized by the government as an official preschool program. She also dreams for more space. She dreams for teens to complete their studies. She dreams of a place for them to practice their sports because they had to give up their old practice space to build the new school.

Mayra – Dreams of Community Centers for all communities. She dreams of proper nursery spaces for the young children w/ bathroom facilities, running water, etc.

Rosie – Dreams of spaces for teens. She says the desire for education is already there. They just need opportunity and options. She also dreams of a place for them to play sports. More space for more

classes and workshops. She is also working on a program called Enea—which is a way to complete school without having to go. She’s trying to make sure this option is available to their teens.

Griselda – the dream is to have more funds for more staff so they can use volunteers more efficiently.

Barbara – dreams of proper spaces for the children. More education. “In any society education will move you up from poverty”

We had our final team dinner at the other hotel restaurant. Lots of laughter

DAY 5

Driver: Alejandro

We woke. Had one last breakfast at the hotel. Loaded ourselves into the van and headed for the border. It took 2.5 hours to go less than a mile. We were visited by street vendors. Many of the team purchased foam puzzle maps of the USA and Mexico. We spent a good 30 minutes laughing at the inaccuracies. Next team trip: the great state of Boston. Followed by the shared capitol of Alabama and Mississippi: Nuevo Orleans. After that we can visit Utha; Detroit, New York; and the capitol of the state of Dallas: Texas (or course).

We finally made it to the border crossing. We made it across without any issues. We all made our flights.

NOTEABLE QUOTES from the trip:

“We love what they do because they spread the message.” – Barbara Ocampo (regarding volunteers)

“With just one letter many things can change.” – Barbara Ocampo

“Everything that we do we do with love.” – Barbara Ocampo

“Without your presence or your visit we feel like nobody knows us or knows what we are doing.” - Dikar

“We are creating citizens.” – Barbara

Names we accidentally (or purposefully) called each other:

Jim: Bill

MaryAnn: Mary Jane

Kelly: Terry

Paula: Phyllis

Sue: Audrey

Susan: Susanna

Melissa: Marissa

I learned so much from this trip. And that’s because of the people that journey with me. Here’s what each of them taught me.

Dana: You taught me that trying (even if it's scary) is better than doing nothing. You were the first person not afraid to look stupid in their language. Thanks for giving me the courage to attempt to do the same.

Jeanne: I kinda want to be just like you! You are so awesome. You are full of joy and so surprising. I want to be surprising like that too. I learned something new about you every day.

Jim: From you I learned joyous rebellion. Thanks for being brave enough to challenge the statistics.

Kelly: I learned that sometimes you feel better if cry with a friend. Because eventually you'll start laughing and Dana will take a picture of it.

MaryAnn: I learn so much from you! I feel so blessed to have gotten to see part of the world with you. You are a great time leader: kind, gracious, organized, and you care about your team.

Melissa: I knew God wanted me to see/hear/feel something in Mexico. I thought what I needed to see/hear/feel would be taught to me by a Mexican. I was wrong. God brought me to Mexico so he could speak to me through YOU. You said, "The volunteers are so amazing... and not just the ones here. I mean the child ambassadors too. I mean, what you do... matters. And I'm so amazed..." I have never really valued what I do. I've never taken the time to look at the big picture at what my efforts mean. And it all hit me like a ton of bricks when you said that. My efforts, because of God's amazing, miraculous, ridiculous, merciful love are changing the world for someone somewhere. I'll remember the way the breeze was blowing, the way the sun was shining, the kids' laughter as they played soccer. Because that was the moment God used you to teach me something amazing. Thank you.

Sue: I learned kindness and grace from you. You were such a great roommie. The way you were fully present with the kiddos was so sweet.

Susan: I learned so much about prayer from you. I loved how your heart just cries for Jesus.

Thank you all for sharing your beauty with me. I'm blessed to know you and call you friends. I miss you all dearly.

