

Safe Water, Safe Homes
Mexico
Lake Forest College
Carolina Guadarrama, Mexico, Lake Forest College
Fatemeh "Sima" Riahi, United States, Lake Forest College

A. A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project

The primary goal of our project was to provide safe water sources to residents in Alpuyecá Morelos, Mexico through the installation of filters and plumbing systems. In addition, our goal was to improve the overall health status of the community by providing sources of safe water. We hope that our project restored a sense of peace and security in the seventy homes selected for installation. Our goal was also to ensure the sustainability of the project through community education and the adoption of the project by three local physicians.

B. Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?

The primary source of funding was the Projects for Peace award. The supplementary amount was donated by Carolina Guadarrama. The project has been adopted by three local physicians who will carry the project forward.

C. How did you come up with the idea for your project?

The idea for the project was born from the recognition that the lack of safe water is a worldwide issue and that contaminated water is health hazardous to communities. We were inspired by the stories we collected from the residents of Alpuyecá and their day to day lives. Our goal was to meet the community's needs in the best manner possible. This led to the metamorphosis of our project from installing rain barrel systems to plumbing systems and filters. Due to this change we were able to help seventy families rather than just five within the community.

D. Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?

The issue our project is responding to exists due to the historical lack of regulation regarding environmental contaminants. It also exists due to limited funding allocated to rural communities. Twenty years ago, a company (unnamed) dumped toxic waste deep into the riverbed near Alpuyecá. The waste was later removed. However, following an earthquake, residual toxins were released into the river, the main source of water to the community. As a result, the community relied on shipments of water every twenty days. With the implementation of our project residents can now have access to water regularly.

E. Why did you choose your host site to work in?

We chose Alpuyecá as our host site because it is a marginalized community in which we identified the greatest need for our project. It was also the community in which we could provide the greatest quality of aid to given our time frame and grant. We also chose this site because it was close to the home of one of our project coordinators who had close ties to the community.

F. What was it like to work in your host site?

Working in Alpuyecá was initially difficult due to barriers in communication. However, frequent visits were possible because of the close proximity of a project coordinator's home to the site. This allowed us to build a trusting relationship with residents and helped the project move forward. We were able to experience a different way of life and gained a deeper appreciation for needs that many take for granted. The members of the community were a joy to be with.

G. Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?

During the initial visit we realized that installation of rain-water systems was not feasible because many homes did not have plumbing systems installed. In order to help a wider range of families and improve the quality of aid provided we decided to install plumbing systems and filters into homes. This also allowed the project to have a continuous impact despite the fact that we would be leaving at the end of the summer. The roads to the town were often blocked. Volunteers and

workers were difficult to find in a short period of time. After communicating with the president of the town we were able to find eight workers who could safely install plumbing systems and filters while staying within the budget plan. We also had to ensure that the water was safe and tested the water multiple times with the help of workers.

H. What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?

Working in Alpuyecá was difficult due to residual fear and distrust residents have from being approached by individuals who offer services and aid in exchange for political clout. There were cases in which residents would refuse to speak to project coordinators due to the deep distrust of those outside of the community. It was difficult to convince families that this was a project that was not for profit or any other sort of gain. Residents presented ID cards often and some were in disbelief that we would provide plumbing systems for nothing in exchange. After some time one family accepted and others soon followed. After this initial roadblock the project moved forward and trusting relationships were established.

I. How do you define peace?

Peace begins in the home and within oneself. During this project we were dedicated to restoring peace in the resident's daily environment. Peace cannot coexist with water shortages, contamination and barriers to the fulfillment of one's basic needs. By providing plumbing systems and filters while ensuring that there were representatives who could continue this project in our absence we were able to restore a basic need to the community in Alpuyecá. Residents no longer have to wait twenty days for water shipments. Instead, water is readily available in the comfort of their homes. By ensuring that residents have safe water in their homes we hope to help restore a part of their internal peace as well.

J. How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term?

In the short term our project contributes to peace by restoring a basic need to residents in Alpuyecá. In the long term our project will contribute to peace by drawing attention to the needs of this marginalized community. Being able to give bring something positive to a community that experiences violence on a daily basis generates peace within the town. Three doctors have volunteered to continue this project. They aim to improve the healthcare provided as well as sustaining the safety of the water.

K. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?

This project has changed the way we view the resources around ourselves. Seeing homes with no plumbing or water helped us appreciate the ease of access we have to water in the US. When speaking with residents, water was limited to vital tasks such as drinking or cooking. It was restricted when considering washing clothes or taking showers. We saw that people weren't able to clean their vegetables prior to cooking and it impressed upon us the impact that water sanitation has on community health. When invited into homes we were offered food and drinks from families that couldn't afford to do so. The kindness that we were received with was unforgettable. Having the honor of being invited into these homes and to hear their stories has inspired us to carry projects of this nature forward in our personal careers.

"It's unreal to travel fifteen minutes from my town and see a completely different world. It was heartbreaking. That's why our team chose this community. Seeing the smiles of families as water flowed through their homes for the first time in twenty years was an experience I will never forget. To me, that was peace." – Carolina Guadarrama

