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This summer, I worked for the non-profit Manos Abiertas in Salta, Argentina through an internship coordinated by the Foundation for Sustainable Development. Manos Abiertas is a Christian organization with the mission to “serve, promote, and dignify those who most need it, improving their quality of life and easing the situations of poverty, pain, and need that they suffer from, through volunteer work and social, educational, and health programs.” They seek to live out their motto of “Love and Service” through programs that recognize the human dignity inherently possessed by each person and work to empower them to initiate changes in their own lives and in their community. Although my internship was technically with FSD, the vast majority of my time was devoted to activities through Manos Abiertas, and thus, the rest of this report will be more reflective of my individual experience than of FSD as a whole.

As part of their purpose to support community-driven goals through asset-based development, FSD requires each intern to highlight a need faced by their host organization and compose a work plan and budget to address it during their eight weeks on site that will continue to serve the organization after the intern’s departure. The priority is to listen to the needs and existing capabilities of the host organization to best understand how the intern can use their particular skillset to support already existing initiatives. My work plan for Manos Abiertas consisted of several different projects that contributed to an overall goal of allowing the organization to extend their potential reach and involve more people in their programs. My supplementary objectives were as follows: to involve the residents of the Hospedería (their shelter for homeless men) in an activity that made them feel productive and useful, allowing them to dignify themselves through work and giving a hand in solidarity; improving the library

and garden of Escuela Solá, a rural and under-funded school; and translating the “Ciudadanos Inspirados” (Inspired Citizens) curriculum into English for use in bilingual schools and English institutes.

The majority of my time was spent translating the eight modules of the “Ciudadanos Inspirados” program. The program is designed for students in their last two years of Secondary school and teaches lessons in leadership, entrepreneurship, and civic responsibility. These translations built capacity by allowing Manos Abiertas sites throughout Argentina to bring this curriculum to more students. This program reflects FSD's philosophy of supporting local initiatives instead of bringing in international organizations. It was designed and written in Argentina, for use in Argentina, and therefore can better relate to students through country-specific anecdotes, references to popular local culture, and a more nuanced appreciation for the types of challenges the students may encounter in their daily lives and in their efforts to confront the injustices they witness. The goal is to empower young people to develop their capacity to transform their realities and take responsibility for the changes their communities need. Through doing these translations, I learned a lot about the obstacles faced by people in Argentina who want to find sustainable solutions for their families, schools, community, city, or country. Once formatted, these new lesson plans will potentially be available for use by Manos Abiertas sites throughout Argentina.

Another important part of my project was my partnership with Escuela Rural “Dr. Ernesto Solá”, which serves an area of Salta riddled with problems of poverty, neglect, drugs, and teen pregnancy, among others. I worked to improve their library by soliciting donations of Argentine literary classics and textbooks from other local schools. With the help of the patroncitos, the residents of the men’s homeless shelter, four new bookshelves were constructed

to house the additions. The inclusion of these men in the process was intended to provide them an opportunity to feel productive and capable of giving back to a population in need, as well as being dignified through work.

I also worked with the professor of science at Escuela Sola to initiate a discussion with the students about environmental sustainability through saving water and finding new uses for disposable items. I had already been collecting plastic bottles to build toys for the school when I spoke with Carmela, the science teacher, about a problem they were having with a broken septic tank. I was emitting a foul odor, and her efforts to build a garden to offset the smell were being inhibited by the dry soil. She pointed out some nearby plastic bottles and mentioned that it would be perfect to build planters out of them because they would better conserve water and also present an opportunity to supplement their current lessons about the environment with a practical way to reuse waste and raise awareness about the benefits of recycling. I decided to adjust my work plan by using the resources I had already collected to build the planters instead because I wanted to address an expressed, concrete need. The students, as well as the Manos Abiertas staff, collected more plastic bottles that I then turned into planters for the students to paint and use in their garden. I also purchased paint and brushes for a mural to be painted in their art class that will reflect themes of conservation and environmental awareness. This was intended to give the students a medium through which to express these lessons and exercise their own creativity, as well as give them an opportunity to take ownership of their school and produce something beautiful and tangible to see for years to come.

A critical error in my project plan came from not knowing about the winter vacation during the final two weeks of my internship. I had planned to do most of the work relating to the book drive and the mural towards the end, and when I tried to move up my dates the school was

busy with preparing for end-of-term exams, parent conferences, various national and provincial holiday celebrations, as well as the school's anniversary. Because of this, most of the schools and institutes I contacted told me that they would not have time to look through their collections until after the break and there were not enough art classes left to execute the mural. Neither of these things are fatal to the ultimate success or sustainability of my project, but if I could do it over again I would be more cognizant of dates while crafting my work plan.

This experience provided an opportunity for a ton of personal growth, but not much professional growth. I felt that the majority of my work was service, rather than development related. While personally I was quite happy with this, it was not at all the experience I was expecting from this summer, and I think this would have been a great frustration for a lot of people in my position. My highlights from this summer did not come from the parts of the experience that could be labeled "development work". I learned the most from the conversations I had with other volunteers, the teachers at Escuelá Sola, and the residents of the Hospedería when I went twice-weekly to prepare dinner. Although I don't think I gained many skills that will help me in my future career, I matured a lot personally. Through gaining a better understanding of the heart behind Manos Abiertas' mission, to recognize and show love to all individuals befitting their identities as children of God, I thought a lot about my faith and my values, and why this kind of service is their natural and necessary manifestation. I also learned a lot about Argentina's political, social, and economic woes and gained a more empathetic understanding of the effects of rampant, systemic corruption. This reaffirmed my desire to study political science and pursue a career in law to protect the institutions that allow American democracy to function as well as it does. Because this was more of a service than development organization, I feel that these lessons will be more easily transferable to my life back in the

States. My other important takeaways have been greater personal confidence in traveling and navigating my way in a new culture. Adapting to the Argentine manner of speaking Spanish and getting over general homesickness were huge challenges, but in overcoming them I feel much better about tackling similar experiences in the future. I am incredibly grateful for this summer and all of the ways that it challenged and pushed me to leave my comfort zone and become intimately invested in another set of realities that I would never have otherwise gotten the opportunity to witness.