

Taylor Craft  
VivePeru  
Peru  
Summer 2016

This summer I had the privilege of working for Vive Perú at the Trujillo site. As an organization, their overall aim is to improve the conditions and provide aid to the impoverished communities through the areas of clinical medicine, public health and social work.

For myself, as a volunteer, a typical workweek consisted of a mix between both the public health and social work programs. My primary responsibilities were in association with social work. Three other volunteers and I worked closely with boys' and girls' homes (Hogar San José and Hogar de la Niña) in order to help support the children that were residents there. Every Monday through Friday from 9am - 12:30pm another volunteer and I would visit Hogar de la Niña wherein we would spend several hours engaging in different activities such as coloring, painting, drawing, singing, and casual conversation. There were generally ten to fifteen girls that we worked with at a time and they were all between the ages of eleven and seventeen. As Vive Perú volunteers, we were charged with the responsibility of supporting them in any way we could, one of which was through workshops that we conducted every Tuesday and Thursday. On Monday and Wednesday evenings all of the social work volunteers would meet with the coordinator at the site office to plan workshops focused on a theme that Vive Perú had set up for the prospective session. During my time there, the goal was to address the topic of self-esteem. With this we as volunteers were able to not only learn more about the girls and some of what they dealt with below the surface, but we were also able to help them to see their worth and opportunity that existed separate from

their situations. Many of them had been forced to live in the Hogar because of bad home situations while others were simply without a family at all. Knowing these circumstances, Vive Perú wanted to work to try and build up and edify these young ladies so that they would not only find confidence in themselves, but also take that confidence and dare to rise above the negativity that seemed to be present in their lives.

Working alongside the public health volunteers, I was also able to continue taking part in the hands-on nature of the internship. This work in the communities demonstrated the importance and need for an organization like Vive Perú for impoverished areas in Trujillo. Each week, two separate groups of volunteers would go to two different communities: Señor de los Milagros and Altos. The group that I was a part of traveled to Señor de los Milagros every Tuesday afternoon to teach the children about the importance of hygiene. The first week we focused on washing your hair, the second week we created a song to facilitate a lesson on the importance of brushing your teeth, the third we emphasized how to properly wash your hands and the fourth we improvised a skit that demonstrated how germs spread. We would often bring supplies like toothbrushes, toothpaste and bar soap so that the kids were able to turn the hygiene lessons into life habits. The end goal of visiting both communities and presenting hygienic information was the related to the medical campaign. At the end of the first session all of the program volunteers teamed up to put on a campaign that provides medical assistance to those who live in the community that we visited. Dentists, pediatricians, and medical doctors all come to support Vive Perú in their efforts to improve the conditions in communities like Señor de los Milagros. There is also a pharmacy that is set up to provide medicine and vaccinations to all who need it.

Although the work was a huge part of my time in Trujillo, there are also things that shaped my experience outside of that. For example, the homestay experience was definitely rewarding. I was placed with Mama Elsa and two other roommates. If you are open to it, there is definitely a lot of opportunity to learn the ins and outs of Peruvian culture through the more personal experience of a homestay. From the necessity of house shoes to the lack of garbage bins, the differences in culture became clearer to me over the course of time. Not only that, but I also developed a very close relationship with my host mom. She and I spent a couple of weekends together while my two roommates were away traveling and I truly believe that, more than anything, helped to really boost my confidence in living the Peruvian lifestyle. Additionally, my Spanish-speaking skills improved tremendously simply from being immersed in the language from morning till night. There was ample opportunity to circumvent the constant Spanish speaking, namely being around other American volunteers, however as long as one is open to the immersive experience the sky is the limit with all that one can learn.

One more aspect of this internship that was intriguing is the opportunity to travel. On the weekends there is a chance to travel to several different destinations that range from beach towns to six and a half hour hiking tours, all of which are worth the time. For example, I traveled to three different and amazing destinations. The first was the beach town of Pacasmayo, second was the world's fifth tallest waterfall in Chachapoyas, and third was the world-renowned Machu Picchu. The latter can be scheduled through Vive Perú before arrival while the former are trips that you can do with other volunteers on a free weekend during your session. Other destinations include

Huaraz (a beautiful glacier to hike to see), Mancora (another breath-taking beach town), and Cajamarca (souvenirs and rock formations).

Overall, Vive Peru makes for a very well rounded international internship experience. It is *world* experience with *work* experience and there is no better combination. For me, personally, social work aided me in my conversational skills by working directly with individuals in a community. I was able to see the differences in cultural values and that affected how I would interact and things that I could not say. These were among the many things that I had to balance while there, but they challenged me and I feel I am all the more prepared for “life things” because of it. I have also learned that volunteering is less about you giving your time and more about who will receive it. I would say that my time with Vive Perú was not so much a “life-changing” experience but rather a “life-expanding” experience. I have come out well versed in all things Peruvian and far more educated about the social work and public health issues that the country faces. This lesson is one I will continue to unpack throughout the future, and for that I can say I am truly thankful to Vive Perú.