Rather than soaking in the sun on the beaches of Cancun, a group of 10 students spent spring break at the Hogar Escuela Armando Rosenberg orphanage in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic.

Every year, the Catholic Campus Ministry (CCM) sponsors the trip to the orphanage during spring break to repaint the basketball court and interact with the children. The group also spent time in the classroom teaching the children a small amount of English.

They also brought down cooking paddles to go along with the pizza supplies that were sent down in a previous trip, and they repainted the doors on some of the rooms.

The children, ranging from ages five to 15, are significantly impacted when groups like this come down to work with them, according to junior Meghan Kennedy, a student who participated in the trip. “I knew going down that the kids were going to impact me a lot,” said Kennedy. “When we were leaving, we were crying a lot because we didn’t want to leave the children, and the children were crying too because they got so attached to us—it’s easy for them to do that because they’re not around people like us very often.”

Sophomore Janine Vasconcelos, who also went on the trip, agreed with Kennedy about how the children were “just amazing.” “The poverty I saw there was like nothing I’ve seen in the United States,” said Vasconcelos. “They’re so poor and in so many ways they have nothing, but they are so happy; they seem so much more satisfied with life.”

When the students were painting the basketball court, the children would stand around them and watch them paint. “You could just see how happy they were,” she said. “After we were finished, they all came and played basketball immediately. It was so nice to see that because they had this newly painted basketball court and they could have fun.”

Kennedy said that she spoke on behalf of all of the students who went on the trip when she said that everyone was really impressed and affected by working with the children. “When we were all leaving on the last day, everyone was saying how they wanted to come back, and it was definitely something they were going to take with them for the rest of their lives,” said Kennedy. “It was the best experience they’ve ever had.”

Although the students had to pay their own way, some money came from various campus organizations’ donations, the church, people from the outside community who attend services at Rider and faculty and staff. Kennedy received a $200 donation from Dr. Patricia Louise Leonard, associate professor in the Department of Teacher Education. The first $100 went toward the orphanage and the other $100 helped pay for Kennedy’s trip expenses.

“She helped me so much to get to the place where I felt I wanted to be,” said Kennedy. “In order to apply and be accepted to go to Santo Domingo, students do not have to speak Spanish fluently, and the group is not exclusively for CCM members. Kennedy said she recommended it to other students. “I would definitely recommend it to anybody who is really passionate about volunteering or children because it’s such a great experience to go down there,” she said. “There’s a bunch of other stuff down there that I’m sure we could accomplish if we had more people and if we were there longer.”

By Cara Latham

Friday, March 25, 2005

Students grab the paintbrush

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