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IE3 Final Report
Centro Para Los Adolescentes
San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

Three weeks after arriving in San Miguel, I began my ten-week internship at Centro Para Los Adolescentes. During the first week I found an apartment, arranged Spanish review classes at a local language school, explored the city, and met plenty of friends. In the next two weeks I studied at the language academy four hours per day to brush up on my rusty Spanish that I had not used for nearly two years. Luckily the total immersion made the language come flooding back to me.

On July 14th, I climbed up the steep street of Ignacio Allende and entered the beautiful domed building at CASA, feeling a little nervous and unsure of what I would do on my first day. I knew there were three other interns already at the site that had started a few weeks before. The front desk receptionist, Lourdes (better known as Lu) immediately gave me a comprehensive, but overwhelming tour of the organization. CASA is made up of about seven different programs and Lu told me I could choose any one that I wanted to spend my first day with. I chose Teatro, or the theatre program, which is staffed with about local “San Miguelenses” all around my age. That day, I helped them design and color posters that were part of their upcoming presentation on relationship violence that they would perform in schools and community centers. Every day of that week, I spent time with different programs including the child development center, the maternity hospital, the library, and the health promoters that go to surrounding rural communities. After experiencing each program, I made a schedule of where I

would like to spend each day of the week in the nine more weeks that followed. I decided to spend three days per week in the maternity hospital working with the professional midwives, one day per week in rural communities with the health promoters, and one day per week with Teatro.

It was amazing how little Spanish I understood in my first few days at CASA. Excelling at Spanish within a classroom is very different from speaking it in everyday life and even though I had been immersed in Spanish before, it had been a very long time. However, by the end of my ten weeks at CASA, my Spanish abilities had skyrocketed. I no longer had to think meticulously about every word I heard or said. I could easily carry on conversation without awkward pauses and confusion. The friendships I developed with coworkers at CASA and friends I made in San Miguel were the main factors that really improved my language ability.

My biggest personal gain from my internship at CASA was my time in the maternity hospital with the professional midwives. Before I came to CASA, I knew I wanted to go to graduate school to become a nurse practitioner, however I didn't know what type of medicine I wanted to focus on. I had worked as a reproductive health counselor before in Seattle so I had an interest in women's health but working at CASA completely affirmed my suspicion that I would enjoy that field. After assisting with two births, sitting in on countless prenatal and postnatal consultations, and observing the personal bond between a midwife and her patient, I knew that I wanted to go into Women's Health/Nurse midwifery. That certainty made the whole internship worthwhile. Of course there were many other benefits, like the many friendships I

developed with both CASA coworkers, the other interns, and friends I made in San Miguel.

In order to be an asset to the organization, I had to be very self-directed, which was one of the biggest challenges of the internship. CASA's internship program is not very structured and they rely on their interns to be self-motivated and to create their own schedules and projects. That can simultaneously be a curse and a blessing, however I got used to it after several weeks and ended up designing a cervical cancer awareness project along with writing several articles for the local newspaper about CASA's maternity hospital. However, as my supervisor told me when I started the internship, the best thing you can do as an intern is simply spend time developing genuine relationships and learning about the Mexican culture. The true purpose of an international internship is not to translate documents or do data entry, it is to experience another culture and learn from the people around you. Luckily, my supervisor was of that mindset and assured us that we were not there to change the organization, but to learn, observe, and do our best.

My supervisor was Nadine Goodman, the founder of the organization and a native New Yorker. She moved to San Miguel in the late 70s and married a Mexican and started a very small organization, which eventually developed into what it is today. Nadine met with me and the other interns weekly to discuss what we were doing and learning and what our biggest challenges were. She gave us good guidance but maintained an incredibly busy schedule and therefore was not always available to talk. I would tell future interns only to work at CASA if they feel comfortable with minimal supervision and instruction.

Before this summer, I had never traveled to México. I had spent a considerable amount of time in Nicaragua, but I knew that Mexico had a different culture entirely and

the adventure, but for those who would be nervous simply showing up in a foreign city, there are ways to arrange a little more beforehand.

Once I started my internship I was very much settled into my own one-bedroom apartment and I had the lay of the land down. I spend Monday through Friday at CASA from 9am to 3pm. The hours were great and twice a week I went straight from CASA to my guitar teachers' house just a few blocks down the hill. My summer in Mexico was a great time to start studying an instrument because my schedule was less hectic than usual.

If I could give a few tips to future interns at CASA in San Miguel de Allende, I would suggest that you simply take each day as it comes and try not to over prepare for your cultural experience. San Miguel is an incredible and magical city where you will meet amazing people if you keep an open mind and try to put yourself out there to others as much as possible. The Mexican people will recognize that and embrace you with open arms. Remember that the relationships you form will make a greater impact at your internship than the projects and tasks that you completed.