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**MESE-Street Children Project
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MESE Street Children Project-Internship

My 10 weeks as an intern at MESE-Vasco de Quiroga, I.A.P was definitely an experience to remember. My very first day, I was greeted by the staff with excitement to have me. My supervisor gave me a power point presentation about MESE and the kinds of services it provides to the families and children of Morelia. She prepared me for the kinds of adventures I would embark upon throughout my time at MESE and the kinds of work I would participate in with the staff.

I was really nervous when I first began my internship at MESE because I was not fluent in Spanish. I studied Spanish for many years, but it was the first time I was actually traveling to a Spanish speaking country and the first time that I was practicing to speak on a consistent basis. It was hard to be able to understand what was going on about 50 percent of the time. It was much harder to understand the conversations between others than it was when someone was speaking directly to me in Spanish. It made it frustrating because I wanted to understand what was going on with the mothers when they came in to talk to the social workers about different issues they were facing. The language barrier was probably the most challenging thing for me during my internship.

With time however, as I got more and more comfortable speaking to others in Spanish, my comprehension level went up. My word of advice for future interns going to any foreign country is to not be afraid to practice speaking the language. Without practice and confidence, you will only get so far in your speaking abilities and your contributions to the organization as a whole. Once I began to be less afraid to speak with the staff, mothers and children of the organization, I realized that my Spanish skills were improving. With lots of exposure, I was gaining a lot more experience speaking which increased my comprehension and speaking

abilities.

Although I was able to get a variety of experiences at MESE and participated in different kinds of activities, a lot of my days consisted of doing a similar routine. I usually got to work between 9:30am and 10:00am, just in time to head out with one of the social workers to the neighborhoods to do the assessments. Usually, about two social workers went out a day to the neighborhoods while one stayed behind. The social worker and I took combis (little minivans that are a common use of transportation in Morelia) and buses to get to the neighborhoods. We visited one neighborhood a day; usually each neighborhood had several families from the program who lived there.

Once in the neighborhood, we usually went on a hunt to try to find the homes. This was a little difficult sometimes because the social workers are not too familiar with the families' addresses and we would spend much time searching, sometimes not being very successful. More often than not however, we did find the homes; it just took some time. Once in the homes, the social worker asked questions to assess the child's progress in school, the income status of the family, the relationship between the family members, and what the funding given by MESE for the child was used for during that month. After finishing the assessments for the day, we got on either a combi or a bus to go home. I usually was done with work around 2:30pm or 3:00pm and got home in time to have lunch with my host family.

It was a great opportunity for me to work at MESE both personally and professionally. I am currently receiving a Masters in Social Work and I wanted to understand the different challenges faced by families from a different country and challenges faced by the organizations providing services to them. It was helpful for me to work at MESE because I witnessed first hand the kinds of lives the children and parents of MESE lived. I learned how to give service to these

individuals and how MESE was affected by other important factors that limited or increased the amount of help they were able to provide.

I was happy to have received the opportunity to also learn how the administration was run as well within MESE. I believe now that I have a lot of background experience that will help me as a future social worker who is interested in working with immigrants and the administration side of an organization as well. Personally, it was an unforgettable experience meeting all the families and working to help them. My 10 weeks at MESE only intensified my desire to work with immigrant families in the United States.

Although I wasn't an expert, I took initiative to make sure that my presence at MESE was useful to the organization. I worked to address issues that concerned the staff at MESE. Hygiene, I was told was a big issues for the families. For this reason, I worked hard during the home and family assessments to observe hygiene-related issues so that I could later lead a hygiene teaching session to the mothers. I pushed myself to also become familiar with all the different aspects of MESE and I was open to offer help in any area that would be beneficial to the organization.

I made sure to go to my supervisor at MESE who showed concern for my comfort at the organization and my happiness with what I was learning. She was very busy at times, but she definitely cared about my questions, comments and suggestions. I wished however that my supervisor had more time for me to get some guidance and attention. The former supervisor of the social workers had recently left MESE to work in a different city, which ended up giving my supervisor at the time more responsibility and less availability for questions, concerns or supervision. I would definitely recommend to future interns that want to work at MESE to have a plan ready as to what you want to gain from their internship and an idea of what they would like to provide for the organization. Don't expect that a plan will be created and ready for you by the

organization. I felt like at times that I was not needed by the organization and they were too busy to pay much attention to me. Therefore, I took it upon myself to reflect on what it was I wanted to gain from the organization and what I could contribute. The staff really do want you to feel comfortable and happy with your internship, so they will work with you if you have a particular interest to work in a certain area. It is therefore important that you be aggressive and approach the supervisor with desires, questions and ideas.

Being a Masters of Social Work student, I also had a lot of guidance from my liaison through the school of social work. We emailed back and forth about my placement and the different kinds of things I was learning at the organization. Through learning contracts and core curriculum requirements, I was able to get a lot of valuable advice and suggestions. I received a lot of support from my liaison and she worked extra hard to challenge my learning and work experience so that I was getting a well rounded experience at MESE. Through her support and guidance, I pushed myself to focus on many different aspects of the organization and ended up getting a very fulfilling experience and work practice at MESE.

When first finding out that I was going to Mexico, I had very mixed feelings. I was really excited but nervous as well to be going to a country that was negatively viewed and ignorantly judged. I had no idea what to expect. Upon arriving to Mexico and throughout my time at MESE I realized just how rich and poor Mexico really was. Despite what many people think or say, Mexico is very developed and there are very many well off families. I lived with host parents who were incredibly successful and lived in a beautiful neighborhood where their neighbors were just as or even more successful. While witnessing the life of many well off families and at the same time visiting the low income neighborhoods and assessing the families of MESE, I got a very clear picture that in Mexico there are not many middle class families. Instead, you see

more that Mexico is divided by rich and poor families.

My impressions of Mexico did change throughout the short time I spent there. There are so many things to see and amazing things to learn about their history. I had no idea that Mexico was so rich in history and beautiful in architecture. I visited very many places while I was there. I wished I knew more about the cities of Mexico beforehand so that I could have known more places I could have traveled to. It would have been nice to do some research before leaving of the many amazing places to see while I was there. You still will however get a lot of advice and recommendations while down there of different places to visit.

Things to do in Morelia and Mexico

Entertainment in Morelia

Aside from my internship, I spent much time exploring Morelia, hanging out and traveling Mexico. Morelia is incredibly beautiful and there are a lot of old buildings and beautiful architecture. There is also a lot of entertainment. There are a couple of movie theatres which are pretty cheap and are even cheaper on Wednesdays. There is also a VIP movie theatre which I really enjoyed. It costs about the same as entering a movie theatre in the U.S. but it is half off on Thursdays. The chairs are reclining, huge chairs and there are waiters and waitresses that come and serve you. If you can, definitely get a chance watch a movie at least once in VIP.

There are also malls and museums you can visit. There are lots of places to eat and even a couple of American restaurants like Applebees and Chiles. There is a bowling alley if you want to go bowling. If you're a fan of dance clubs there are really huge clubs in Morelia which are free on certain days for females. If you like to salsa dance, there is a salsa club called Casa de la Salsa. I loved this place and have never danced so much when I went there. If you like to dance

or want to learn salsa or other Mexican cultural dances this is the place to go.

Transportation in Morelia

Transportation is very easy and convenient. They have tons of combis that go to different areas of the city and plenty of buses to get around. When I was there it cost 4 pesos and 50 centavos (cents) to ride the combis or buses, but there was talk that they might raise prices up to 5 pesos which is normal for other parts of Mexico. There are bus stops to catch the combis or buses, but you can flag them from anywhere, as long as they are going in that direction they will stop. The only thing is all buses and combis stop running after about 9 or 10pm. If you plan on staying out late, which you probably will some nights, there are tons of taxis throughout the city that run all night long. I had no problems with the taxis and was never ripped off. They are usually pretty honest and safe. You can even share a taxi with friends which will make the charge even less for you if your friend lives on the way or pretty close to where you live.

Money and Banks in Morelia

It's really easy to withdraw money from any ATM. Ask your bank before leaving to see if they have any sister banks down in Mexico. I heard from friends who bank at Bank of America that they were not charged at Santander Bank in Mexico since they were a sister bank of Bank of America. Usually you can take out up to 4000 pesos (400 U.S. dollars) at a time.

Traveling in Mexico

One thing I would really recommend that you do and that many students do in Mexico is travel. The Mexican culture is amazing and there is a lot of history and things to see. Even in the state of Michoacán there's a lot to see. There are still many indigenous people that have preserved their culture and language especially in the state of Michoacán. If you have any relationship with the CCL which is the school located in downtown Morelia, they prepare trips

for whoever is interested to travel through different parts of Michoacán. I would advise you to go if you can.

Besides traveling through Michoacán, you can also travel to other parts of Mexico. The bus station in Mexico is amazing, safe and efficient. I used it to travel to many different places. One advice if you're going to be in Mexico over the summer, the bus stations give discounts to students so bring a student ID with you to receive a discount. You can also get a discount in some of the museums and sites when traveling to touristy areas. This is usually in the summer however, when students are on vacation.

Housing Arrangements

I loved my host family. I'm glad I was able to live with a family because it helped me improve in my Spanish even more. If you do not want to live with a host family however, you can rent an apartment for pretty cheap; there is usually a lot of availability. My housing was set up through CCL but I think you can find a host family through other options such as the internet, which may be a little cheaper.

All in all, I am very grateful to have had the chance to intern at MESE and live in Mexico. I really enjoyed myself and learned so much about Mexico, the culture and the people. It is a beautiful place and you will really enjoy your time there. Be open and don't be afraid to explore. Do as much as you can because time does go by really fast.