

ADVICE FROM EXITING VOLUNTEERS TO NEW VOLUNTEERS

This information, though long, is very important to help you prepare for your volunteer time in Ecuador, so please take the time to read it all (and even share it with your parents)! As you read, you'll find that almost all of the past volunteers' advice involves personal preparation. Please take this into account and heed their advice. You'll end up having an even better experience than they did! :)

We also recommend that you re-read this information a couple weeks before you go down so it's fresh in your mind.

*** If you really study the Spanish manual (which is tailored to baby and orphanage vocabulary as well as vocab you'll need in day-to-day stuff), you'll be amazed at how much you understand and can communicate; but only if you make the effort... ***

Ninety-eight percent of 250+ recent volunteers said they were glad they had served with us; 97 percent said they had grown significantly from the experience; 96 percent said they'd recommend it to others; 98% said they felt safe while serving with us. However, past volunteers have experienced some frustrations or felt unprepared in some areas and the following comments from them reflect those feelings and their advice to future volunteers.

1. What was the biggest surprise you encountered when you first worked in the orphanages?

- surprised with the good conditions of the orphanage; was expecting much worse
- not very many employees at the baby/toddler orphanages; volunteers aren't extra help, they're a necessity
- how they feed the kids at the baby orphanage
- seeing how much love and care the children really need
- so many kids are so far behind in learning
- the use of cloth diapers and little to no diaper wipes
- washing babies' bums with your hands in a sink (in general, this is Quito more than Cuenca)
- it really is hard work what the volunteers do
- they do things differently with the children
- the language barrier being problematic when trying to do activities with the children
- how much OSSO is involved and how dependant some orphanages are on the volunteers
- the number of children

We address these topics in the information on our website, so please read about them.

2. What was your biggest frustration?

- not being able to communicate what and when I want to
- not being able to hold the children as much as we wanted to
- not being able to give therapy and things we knew would help the children because of language barriers
- force feeding (or the appearance of it)
- language—not being able to understand what the nuns and workers wanted us to do; it's hard not being able to communicate thoughts and feelings

- not being able to say exactly what we wanted to in Spanish (to the kids and workers)
- not being able to fully communicate thoughts to the workers because of lack of knowledge of Spanish
- getting sick in a new place
- not being able to communicate in Spanish
- sometimes it doesn't feel like the nuns and workers want you there or appreciate what the volunteers do
- not understanding the nuns
- not knowing the language
- language problems
- it was frustrating not to know Spanish; wanted to be able to communicate better
- not being able to understand the workers
- language barrier
- that we couldn't communicate with the children

So, what would you conclude the biggest frustration is?! We try to emphasize that learning as much Spanish as you can before you go and then taking classes while you're down there will really help you...but most volunteers underestimate how much this impacts your experience—learn from the advice of past volunteers and make the effort; you'll have a better experience because of it!!!

3. What could you have done (or did you do) to be better prepared to work with the children (aside from making the effort to learn as much Spanish as possible)?

- bring a smile and patience
- learn names as quickly as possible (of children and workers) and learn the schedule they're used to
- prepare yourself emotionally—center all your energy around serving the kids
- bring activities and supplies to meet the needs of the children and help them progress
- learn ways to interact and play with kids
- use the Spanish manual—it's tailored to children and the orphanage environment
- need to understand the kids come from all different backgrounds therefore they act different than we're used to
- learn about stages of growth in children—things to do to stimulate progress in development
- learn at what ages the children should be doing things at; such as what age they should be walking, crawling, etc. (a lot of the kids are behind where they should be)
- understand the cultural differences
- learn about appropriate disciplining

The more **you** prepare yourself for this experience, the better it will be for you *and* for the children!

4. What advice would you have for incoming volunteers?

- always stay focused on the kids; every day is more amazing!
- leave lots of room in your suitcases when you come because you'll fill them by the time you leave (souvenirs, gifts, etc.)

- it's important to come with a really good attitude and an open mind; just let the kids love you and you won't be able to leave without falling in love with them and having them change your life
- always have a good attitude and when in doubt...love (the kids, other girls, Project Directors, etc.)
- "you need to serve to love and then you'll love serving;" you shouldn't come here thinking of yourself—it should all be about the kids; you have to just forget yourself and live for the smiles of the children
- have a good attitude and work hard!
- bring stuff for the kids, activities, games, clothes, ANYTHING! They love everything and need everything, so bring as much as you can
- try to have lots of different activities each time you go into the orphanage; come with ideas of different things you can do
- don't have too many expectations
- come prepared to work hard; you'll be tired and you'll be drained at the end of the day; learn as much Spanish as you can before you come; you can get by without it, but knowing Spanish will enhance your experience; come ready to love and serve with all your heart
- try to learn more Spanish, get absorbed in the work as soon as you can, remember that you're here for the kids, be friends with and include all the girls at home, work hard not to complain; be optimistic; love your time here—it flies!
- be prepared that this is one of the hardest things you'll ever do, but loving these kids will change your lives forever!
- have patience
- just love the kids from day one and try to overcome the language barrier
- lose yourself in service
- practice speaking Spanish
- almost all the toiletry stuff you'll need or want is available in Ecuador and you don't need to bring them!
- come ready to work hard and love the children and it'll be an amazing experience
- if a worker seems to be frustrated with you (language barrier), don't take it personally; just do the best you can
- when you come be prepared to leave all the distractions from home before you come so you can focus all your time, energy and thoughts on the children
- you need a good attitude; things will happen that are not easy to take in—smile!
- start working hard and loving the kids from day one; play with them while you change, bathe and dress them
- be prepared to work hard; put everything you have into working with the children because it's worth it
- don't get frustrated with wiggly babies; babies will wiggle, so tickle them and kiss them and take a second to breathe and then get back to work
- come prepared with FUN, DIFFERENT activities
- plan lots of interesting, engaging, yet easy to understand activities when going in for shifts
- learn as much Spanish as possible; be ready to work hard and love with all your heart
- realize it isn't always easy, and Ecuador is very different from the U.S.

- come prepared with lots of creative activities and with a heart full of love and compassion—remember you're here for the children
- be prepared to take things as they come and welcome challenges
- you'll fall in love with the kids, but it *is* hard work; be ready for anything
- prepare—study the language; be ready to give your all and maintain a positive attitude
- it's up to you for what kind of experience you'll have; keep a good attitude and give all you have; you'll love more than you knew possible
- give it your all and leave with no regrets
- come ready to serve and forget yourself
- you're here to love the children, leave everything else behind and work as hard as you can, with as much love as you can because before you know it, it's over
- leave home at home
- time goes by so fast
- you get out of it what you put into it
- learn as much Spanish as you can
- get in from day one and work hard and love those kids with all your heart
- time goes by so fast and you don't want to have regrets, so make the most of each day
- leave things from home at home—immerse yourself in the experience because once you leave you'll be wishing you were back with your kids and you won't be, whereas if while you're down there you're talking on the phone constantly to boyfriends and family and trying to be “in both worlds” at the same time...very few volunteers have been able to successfully make this work
- learn as much Spanish as you can and use it; make a fool of yourself and talk to the kids and the workers...they'll probably tease you and laugh at you, but they'll very much appreciate the effort and will become your friends for it

Please take this advice to heart and learn from it!!!

5. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of working with the children?

NEGATIVE—staying calm when you get frustrated; sometimes the kids test your patience; it's very hard to leave the kids; you have to eventually say good-bye; not being able to help and love them more!; unbelievably messy diapers (although it was kind of funny sometimes); it can be monotonous because we pretty much do the same thing each day; your patience is tried in many ways; frustration is part of the work; it's emotionally hard to see the children suffer and be so desperate for love; it's hard not knowing the language; need to know more Spanish; a negative aspect is that you get very frustrated and tired; it's hard to work with them because I know they won't remember me, but I'll remember them; language barrier; can't think of negative; it's so tiring emotionally and physically (but there's nothing better); not much—it's just hard work!; seeing malnutrition and neglect's effect; sometimes it's hard to communicate; kids do get sick and go to the bathroom and you'll have to clean it up; the realization that I get to go home to my family and these kids will still be here; definitely the language barrier; not all of them get adopted—it's hard to see the difference between our life and theirs

POSITIVE—the kids are the most amazing people and teach you so much; it's so worth it; you learn so much more from them than they could ever learn from you; everything is positive; their unconditional love; it's so rewarding because the kids do need us; their

love is unconditional—they brighten up when they see you; it's amazing, you grow and develop so much; you learn patience and obedience; you develop a love so strong for the children; they become examples for us—help you to love unconditionally, like they do; the love you feel for the kids and the love they give to you is amazing; so much positive—the love, the joy...; learn to love the children and accept the different ways people raise children; their love; it's so much fun to kiss their faces and be there when they wake up; beautiful children; the kids love you no matter who you are—it makes you feel like you're needed and loved; you feel so needed and so loved by the children; it's so rewarding to care for them, to see them progress emotionally and developmentally and to learn how to care for children better; they're great kids that need to be loved; the 2-way love between the kids and me; I love them so the hard work doesn't seem so hard; you'll fall in love; the kids love and need us; it all seems positive; so fun!, the love, the laughter, the work; it's very rewarding—it'll change your life forever

6. What do you have to say about your experience?

- I loved this experience, it changed my life!
- It's affected me in every way possible...spiritually and mentally. I've grown so much from this experience.
- This experience has changed my life, I love my kids!
- I really have been given a new outlook on life because of this experience. I loved it here and would do it again in a heartbeat. I truly understand why Jesus taught to be as little children because despite these children's circumstances they're amazing. I will be learning lessons from my kids for the rest of my life. It's hard for me to put into words how much this experience has affected me, but I am a better person because of my kids.
- I've become much more sensitive to EVERYTHING. I have been extremely humbled.
- I've prayed that I might come to know the pure love of Christ, that I would love these kids like the Lord would if He were down here. My prayers have been answered but not because of me, but because they loved me. I've felt the joy that comes into your life when all you do is serve. I'll take these babies with me in my heart always. My life will never be the same and all I can think about is what I would be missing out on had I not come. How lucky I am to know these kids, but mostly their Christ-like love.
- It was the best experience of my life!
- This experience has affected me in so many ways. I have grown so much closer to my Heavenly Father; I have learned to get along with people I normally wouldn't get along with, and most of all I have learned to love in a way I never thought possible. These kids have been my life for three months and they mean everything to me. I would do ANYTHING for them. I wouldn't trade this experience for anything. I LOVE THESE KIDS, and will recommend this experience to anyone and everyone.
- This experience has made me appreciate more what I have. It's taught me to love no matter what.
- This experience has given me a greater appreciation for all that I have.
- I see how little these kids have and it makes me realize how much I have. It's also given me a greater desire to serve.
- Best thing of my life.

- This experience has changed my life. I've learned about myself and about my own mission to be a mother. I've learned how much God loves His children wherever they are. I love the children with all my heart. I'm different because of their love.
- The best experience of my entire life. I'd never hesitate to recommend this. The children teach you more than you could ever imagine.
- I've loved this experience and have changed for the better. I've been entirely humbled and have become more grateful for my family, country and religion.