

Speciality: Other – Public health

Country: Peru

Location: Urubamba (Cusco region)

Rural/Urban: Rural

Hospital or non-hospital placement: non-hospital - Community development outreach

Type of placement: Pre-clerkship

Date: 05/11/2010 to 06/25/2010

Project title: UNFPA Reproductive Health Campaign

Organization: Nexos Voluntarios

Website: www.nexosvoluntarios.org

Main language spoken: Spanish (for project implementation)

Other language(s): English (all staff speak excellent English)

Project description: NeVo has other social development initiatives in a variety of areas, including community development, human rights, business and development, education, environment and tourism, as well as opportunities to teach English and volunteer in an orphanage. The majority of volunteers are located in Urubamba, however some placements are available in Lima. Opportunities are available to work with physicians for longer-duration placements (6 weeks in Urubamba, 3 months in Lima), as well as short-duration group medical mission trips (ex. international medical students doing consults in remote communities).

Student experience description: I was involved with the initial development of the Reproductive Health Campaign in 2008 as NeVo's first volunteer in Urubamba. I returned in 2010 to complete an evaluation of the effects of the program on communication in families and schools, interviewing students, teachers, principals and parents as my Critical Enquiry project. Large amounts of data were collected, some of which is still available for analysis (should anyone be looking for a Critical Enquiry project!). The results of this qualitative research are being used to plan future program development and to apply for UNFPA funding (the project has been supported in its intention and with physical materials since its inception however not financially supported by the UNFPA to date). My role included developing the research project and its implementation with significant support for translation provided by NeVo staff and volunteers. Analysis of the data was conducted upon my return to Canada. I also had the opportunity while volunteering to meet with the principal of a school in a nearby smaller community and, at their request, developed a curriculum for their teachers or future volunteers to implement, based on UNFPA materials. Finally, I was fortunate enough to be able to assist with the implementation of theatre-based reproductive health education sessions in a secondary school in Urubamba (developed and implemented by a fellow Queen's Medicine volunteer, Jesleen Rana, during my placement).

Placement safety: Yes. Although the community has frequent strikes in the June/July period closing the town and preventing transport, I never felt personally unsafe. NeVo staff are available to support volunteers should issues arise, including ensuring any necessary medical care is accessed/available. The community of Urubamba is a safe town located approximately an hour's drive from Cusco, a city of 30,000, which is a popular tourist destination and likewise safe. Urubamba is a project location for a number of NGOs providing international volunteering opportunities for volunteers from around the world, and thus international students are well-accepted in the community.

Educational experience (out of 10): 10

Social/cultural experience (out of 10): 9

Does the organization have any religious affiliations? No

At any point did you feel expected to participate in a religious activity? No

Program fee: \$2825 for 6 weeks (includes accomodation, meals, cultural activities weekly, etc.)

Dress code: Culturally sensitive and appropriate casual dress (i.e. no bare midriff, longer shorts, etc.)

Accommodation: We stayed in a volunteer house with other volunteers. Three meals were provided and were included in the cost.

Accommodation cost: Included in volunteer fee

Helpful hints: Clearly coordinate with NeVo staff regarding expectations and goals for your placement. They are eager to help volunteers, and ensuring they know what you require as you conduct your project assists greatly with this process. Being proactive and a self-starter are key features of volunteers, as the projects are largely volunteer designed and implemented (with support and continuity provided by NeVo). Strong spanish-language skills will be a major asset. Spanish lessons are provided (included in volunteer fees).

Questions you are glad to have asked before leaving on placement: Whether or not I needed to bring a laptop - there is one computer at the NeVo house however it is frequently being used by NeVo staff and given the number of volunteers I would have been unable to complete my work without my own computer available. Discussing translation needs prior to arrival - this ensured the organization knew my limitations and what I would need to be able to complete my work for them.

Questions you WISHED you asked before leaving on placement: More details regarding the current situation regarding the Reproductive Health Program to allow me to better plan/prepare - large amounts of preparation were redone upon my arrival to best reflect the situation and thus needs of the organization. Further probing the organization and arranging Skype conversations (as opposed to relying on e-mail) to a greater extent would have been helpful.

Overall, would you recommend this placement for future students? Yes