

Kimberly Robinson, '05

Las Matas de Farfan, Dominican Republic

Nicci and I had the pleasure of spending our summer of service in the Dominican Republic. We stayed in the small town of Las Matas de Farfan about 10 miles from the Haitian border. The Dominican family that took us into their home consisted of a Mother and her two girls, with whom we became close friends despite our difficulties with the language. We were stationed in Las Matas because the Missionaries of Charity run an orphanage/ nutrition center there, in which parents who can not afford to feed their children or care for them properly, can bring them to the center and the Sisters take them in and provide for them. It is not uncommon there to see these babies brought in underweight, and far behind in their developmental stages due to nutritional deficiencies, and nursed back to health by the sisters.

After that first week at the orphanage/ nutrition center we accompanied the sisters and a group of young volunteers from the city and a few seminarians to run a "campamento" in the surrounding campos.

We basically ran a day camp with the kids, including arts and crafts, lots of singing with hand movements and we brought toys and balls for them to play with. We also brought bread and juice for the kids as a snack, but for some it was breakfast and lunch. Each week was in a different campo, and driving to them in the old beat up pick up truck over the dirt roads, and flooded bridges was always half the fun ☺ The group that I led mainly consisted of younger kids under 7 years old (they were a lot easier on me when I mixed up words in Spanish).

It was surprising to see how much fun the kids had just coloring pictures from a coloring book. They would ask to keep coloring pictures as many times as you would let them. It just struck me how these kids were so grateful to get a chance to play with these toys and use crayons and things that most kids in America would be bored with after five minutes.

At the end of the week in each campo, we would have a dance competition that never ceased to amaze me. These kids, (as young as two years old!) were able to get out on the floor and do the Meringue and Bachata better than I could even dream of! The music and dance was such a rich part of their culture, it really was beautiful and soooo much fun!

The girls would get so dressed up to come to the last day, and parents would come as well. These people who lived out in the country and were hard workers. Very rarely would you see a car drive by, it was mostly horses and motorbikes that allowed people to travel. It was really touching to see how much of an event this was for them.

Road to one of the campos.

Also on the last day of each camp, we'd play musical chairs, and then give every kid in our group a toy, a lollypop and salami with crackers. This always sent them home with a great big smile.

It really shows how so little can mean so much. My appreciation for what I have in my life has grown and my desire to serve continues to grow. I would love to return to the Dominican Republic and work with the Missionaries of Charity.

This trip meant a lot to me, and I attribute my experience to the kids I worked with, to the family I stayed with, but most of all to the Sisters that made all of this possible, and impacted so many lives.

These women were such an inspiration to me and to everyone who meets them. They truly embody the spirit of service, and I hope that someday I can give back through my service what they have given me in spirit and inspiration.