

Austin Barajas—Ghana

In July 2019, a team of volunteers and I traveled to Ghana to implement a digital access project. The implementation of the technological equipment in Ghana was the last stage in a yearlong project. In April of 2018, I started a non-profit organization, The Five North Project. The mission of the Five North Project is to work towards a world where students across the globe – regardless of location, gender, or economic status- have equal access to resources, which enhances their educational experience and empowers their future. The first stage of this multi-year project was providing, installing, and implementing technological equipment to disadvantaged schools in the Volta Region of Ghana. In 2018, I personally refurbished over 600 sets of computer stations (i.e., desktop, monitor, keyboard, and mouse). With the help of my team, I organized a shipment of 550 computers to 25 schools throughout the region. Many students in the communities we partnered with had a limited set of clothes. Each computer and monitor were wrapped with multiple articles of clothing. We ended up donating over 2000 items of clothing. The projected impact of this project is 5500 students and many more community members.

Upon receiving the shipment in Ghana, my team and I worked diligently to load the computers with additional open-source materials, check the working status of each computer, and prepare the computers for travel. Each day we traveled to several schools to deliver computers and set up computer labs. I worked with ICT teachers and school administrators to verify working knowledge of computer systems and the installed open-source software. Each school was given a binder full of materials that can be used as a reference for computer repair as well as how-to-guides on using the individual software programs. The organization is preparing a shipment in 2020; we plan on continuing to support both the communities we partnered with and to expand the reach of the project.

In my time here at Alma, I got a deeper understanding of global issues. I felt compelled to take action to address these issues. In the context of The Five North Project, I was able to address an issue I gained an intense interest in a class. Students led, supported, and enacted the effort. I believe it is essential to highlight the ability of college students to take meaningful action that impacts thousands of lives. The goal of starting The Five North Project was to be a student effort to benefit other students globally.

The most notable experience I recall happened on August 10th. A portion of my team and I were traveling around the Volta Region, delivering computers. The first school we stopped at was seemingly ordinary. We installed roughly 30 computers, I worked with the school administrator and ICT teacher. As my team was getting ready to leave the school, the school administrator asked if he could bring students in to see the computers. The students in this community have never seen/used a computer before. My team quickly went around to every computer and started some type of game. The students filed in, and a student or two took a seat at each computer. I distinctly remember seeing the children's faces light up as they interacted with the computers. At that moment, the entire project became real and personal to me. As one of my friends said, "Because of this project, these kids will never know what it is like growing up without a computer." The Five North Project will hopefully live on as a student run-organization that will allow future Alma College students to make a real change in the world. Without the Posey Global program, none of this would have been possible.

Cassidy Beach – Sierra Leone

Summary of Work

I spent four weeks in Sierra Leone starting from the 22nd of July to the 21st of August. I travelled with other Alma students to and from Sierra Leone, but worked alone at the Footprint Missions Sierra Leone Child Care Center in Makankesa Village near Yele town for three of the four weeks I was there. The Child Care Center has twenty children, ranging from ages five to fifteen years old with two live-in mothers, one head mother, a project manager, security, men who work on the agriculture, and a tailor. My responsibilities included writing letters to the sponsors of the orphanage, helping the children improve their English, and teaching at the summer school for the orphans and the children from the nearby villages.

Reflection

I will be forever grateful to the Posey Global Fellowship for providing me with the opportunity to travel, expand my worldview, experience a culture different from my own, and develop relationships that have changed my life for the better. Upon landing in Sierra Leone, I was unsure of what to expect. Given that the Child Care Center had only been open for one year, and no other volunteers had worked there before, my role was not clearly defined. I cried the first night. And the second. I had just met all of the children, the mothers (Mariatu, Zainab, and Safie), the project manager (Joseph Conteh), and the other girl who was going to spend one week there with me. I felt alone and out of place, despite their welcoming and loving nature. I grew to love the children, the mothers, and the culture, and my entire experience. I cried the last night. And on the way home. Not because I felt alone and out of place, but because I was leaving the people and the place that I cherish.

The summer school began after the first week. It took place from nine o'clock in the morning until one o'clock in the afternoon. We began each day by lining the children up by class, saying the Sierra Leonean pledge, and praying. I taught Sullay, the oldest orphan, in a class by himself because he is much more advanced in his coursework than the other children. My main objective was to help him improve speaking, writing, and reading in English. To do this, I gave him one of the novels I brought with me to read, *The Color of Water*. In reading the novel, I learned that Sullay did not know about the continent of Europe or the Holocaust. So, geography and history were implemented into our lessons as well. I had my sister text me a screenshot of a blank map of the world, printed it out, labeled every single country and continent, and reviewed it every single day until I left. When reading the novel, we alternated who read what chapter so that Sullay could hear what the words were supposed to sound like. After the other children caught on to what we were doing, they wanted to participate as well. Eventually, every day after school ended, each child picked out a book and read it to me. It was amazing. Then, once it started to get dark, we would sit around the fire in the kitchen, they would ask me about America, and we would continue talking until it was time to pray. We prayed as one big family every single night, with people from local villages traveling to join us. It became one of my favorite parts of the day. They are amazing. They are smart, they love to learn, they are fun, they are one of my life's greatest blessings. They have taught me so much more than I ever thought I needed to know.

One night, after a long day of teaching, reading with the children, and playing soccer, they asked if I wanted to travel to a local village for cassava root. I said yes. I did not know exactly what the process entailed, but I had not left the compound for about a week and I was curious. I piled into the back of Mr. Conteh's car with Mariatu, one of the mothers, and six of the oldest children (Ramatu, Sullay, Abdul, Fatmata Sia Conteh, Kadiatu, and Aminata Fullah I). We drove for about ten minutes before we reached the village, got out of the car, and quickly ran under the nearest shelter to avoid the rain. When it subsided, we walked through the village to a long, narrow path through tall grass until we reached a river and it began to rain again. Mariatu quickly took off the scarf she was wearing on her head, turned around, and placed it over my hair to protect it from the rain before removing her wrap and using it to protect her own hair. Although it was a small gesture, it made me feel welcomed and appreciated. There was a boy bathing in the river. He watched as we carefully walked across the thin log to avoid falling in before entering the village on the other side. We met the man selling the cassava root, placed the branches on top of our heads to carry, and walked back. The cassava was then planted in the agriculture for the children.

Teaching, learning, listening, and adapting are skills that I felt I developed during this time, all of which are important qualities that will help to shape me into a global leader. I feel that this opportunity has helped me to make progress toward having the ability to make a substantial impact as the leader I intend to become in the future. I cannot fully articulate the gratitude I have for those in Sierra Leone, the Posey Global Fellowship, or for Dr. Hulme for providing me with one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

Lillian Blaisdell- Conservation in the Galápagos Islands, Ecuador

My Posey-Global experience took place in San Cristóbal, in the Galápagos Islands, where I volunteered for four weeks from mid-June 2019 to mid-July 2019. On a weekly basis, I helped control invasive plants in the national park, took care of tortoises at a tortoise breeding facility, did beach and street cleanups, sea lion monitoring, and greenhouse work that involved weeding and planting endemic plants. Essentially, I worked alongside Galápagos National Park rangers, doing what they would assign to other national park rangers, if they had enough funding and staff. I lived with other volunteers, along with a host family, and my weekends were free for local travel and rest. Needless to say, I am beyond grateful to have been given this opportunity to make a difference- tangibly and intangibly- in a place so unique, full of life, and happy to receive support.

I have traveled to Ecuador before, as I was an exchange student in Quito for eight months when I was seventeen, which I thought gave me a leg-up. I knew the language, I was familiar with the culture, and I was excited to experience the Galápagos in an “authentic” way by volunteering and helping the national park, as opposed to going just to swim in the ocean and snap pictures of the iguanas. To some extent, my previous travels to Ecuador did make my life easier; traveling to San Cristóbal was easier, as was maneuvering through airports, and communicating with park rangers and my host family. However, given the things I was “sure” about (the cuisine, language, and landscape), I felt even more nervous about the things that were unknown to me, such as what volunteering would be like, how locals culturally felt about the volunteers, and if I would get along with my fellow volunteers.

Upon arrival, I was overwhelmed by the support I got from the program director, my host family, and the other volunteers. Although they (thankfully) let me sleep for a few hours after my initial orientation, I was immediately welcomed by the other volunteers- international students around my age, also passionate about conservation- and they made sure that I was prepared mentally and physically for the work we did (someone even gave me an extra pair work gloves, which quickly became my most valuable possession, apart from my mud boots). The locals recognized us around town by our Projects Abroad vests, and complimented our work; nothing says “Ecuador” quite like having oranges tossed down from windows to you, by locals, who are supportive and want to make San Cristóbal a cleaner place. Although the work we did was physically intensive, we always found a way to learn something new or make the time go by, as scrubbing tortoise ponds and counting sea lions at 5am is not always the most “fun” thing to do. It was also culturally eye-opening because we weren’t just learning about Galápagos culture, but each other’s, as well. I went to bed exhausted, yet satisfied, knowing that I would get to do something that I was becoming more and more familiar with every day.

Some volunteers complained that the work was too repetitive, but I feel as though I gained a deeper understanding about the importance of our work due to its continuity. After three days a week of weeding, for example, I was able to look up and be amazed that we had cleared hundreds of yards of an old field, which would be used to grow endemic plants and food for the tortoises, which would’ve taken the national park twice as long to complete. Seeing that the work I did, while it may seem small in the grand scheme of things, was making a big difference to the flora, fauna, and the people of San Cristóbal, was what kept me dedicated and inspired.

Overall, this experience helped me to become a better global citizen by allowing me to experience international issues, such as conservation and preserving biodiversity, on a personal level, in a different culture. Through conversations with Ecuadorian park rangers, my program

leaders, and my fellow volunteers, I was able to learn about the importance of biodiversity in the Galápagos, the problems *galapagueños* face, and global opinions regarding conservation and environmental health. Through physically working as a volunteer, I had the chance to see that everyone, through their hard work, day-by-day, can make a difference. An educational and eye-opening experience such as this is priceless, and it has made me want to become a better global leader in order to keep giving back, in the same way I was able to give back every day, for four weeks, to an island that welcomed me so warmly.

Emily Long—Thailand

My experience in Ban Nam Khem Thailand was the most inspiring, heartwarming, and exhilarating experience of my life. I spent a month in a small village two hours outside of Phuket. Every day we would go into schools and teach English to 5-7 year old children. The volunteers would make lesson plans that involved a lot of activities that included movement and facilitated interactive teaching, more so than traditional teaching in the US. As teachers, we were responsible for leading classes and identifying ways to overcome the language barrier between us and the children so that they understood the material. We used a lot of hand motions and acting to show the children how to play the games and eventually teach them the material (numbers, animals, etc.) for that day. I was a little nervous to teach, without prior experience but the kids were so eager to learn you couldn't help but embrace the challenge.

A new system that I actually created with another volunteer was testing the kid's fine motor and memory skills. The system had never been used before and no one had the knowledge to start it. I obtained the idea from a study I had seen on Honors Day last year, so I emailed the speaker asking for all her research and presented it to everyone. Our staff members loved the idea and let me run with it. I had no idea that I would be starting such a huge project when I got to Thailand. We proctored 150 tests in two different schools from the area and started collecting data to record how students improved each time they were tested. It was amazing to be a part of something so new and exciting for the program. Sara, the volunteer I worked with, and I became the leaders of the project very quickly, determining what and how many tests to give the kids. The hardest part was finding an objective way to score their tests. It took a week, but we finally figured it out. The other obstacle we encountered was the language barrier. We had to get every kid's name "correctly" recorded in English, (much harder than it sounds), and explain to them how to complete test without confusing them. It was a lot of trial and error, but we finally got the hang of it and made a roster for each class and created a google document on how to test the students for future volunteers to continue our testing. The most important impact we made by testing those kids was starting a sustainable way for GVI to keep testing the student's abilities. It gives me goosebumps now just talking about it. I never thought I would make such an impact in a short amount of time.

In the afternoon we would head to a foundation called Camilian, this was where kids with disabilities could go while their parents were at work. Each day we would go in with a lesson plan of games for the kids to play, giving them multiple options, so the kids could independently make choices. Leadership was key here when communicating with the kids. Our staff asked us to use as little English as possible when talking with the kids because Thai was hard enough for some of them, so English would confuse them even more. Our staff taught us some Thai but not enough to fully communicate with the kids. Again, we had to brainstorm ways to show the kids what we were doing by hand motions and acting. Children at Camilian ranged from high communication with us to none at all. Most of the disabilities we saw were Autism, Down Syndrome, or Cerebral Palsy. We were not trained in how to interact with the kids, but with time and compassion we all were very comfortable assisting the kids and even giving them one on one attention. Disabilities are either seen as a disgrace or good luck charm depending on the two different cultures in Thailand. In one culture disabled children are babied while the other culture neglects them. It was our job to get the kids to a state of independence no matter the culture they came from. Games were brought to benefit their cognitive and motor functioning. Any game to make the older kid's leaders and show the younger kids how to do things was a success. My

favorite kid is 21 and he has Cerebral Palsy. I quickly learned that I could ask him to do something and the rest of the kids would follow. Through observation I was able to lead the kids without having to use words. This experience has truly changed my life and made me want to continue to volunteer around the world and make an impact wherever I can.

Naomi Mason—Finland

Through the Posey Global program, I had the opportunity to spend two months during the summer of 2019 in Jyväskylä, Finland. I worked at the University of Jyväskylä on the developmental toxicity of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) on rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) embryos. When I first arrived in Finland, it was apparent to me that Finland was much more advanced than the United States. Helsinki ranks in the top ten cities with the cleanest air in the world, the compostable waste from kitchens is used to power Finnish busses, and strains of Hepatitis have been almost entirely eradicated. Finland has been recognized as the happiest country in the world for the past two years, their education system is among the best in the world. For much of the time, I felt like the one coming from a third world country.

I had no idea that I would be the youngest person working in the lab and the only American. Everyone else there had at least a bachelor's degree. Sweden, France, Germany, England, Russia, India, and China were some of the countries besides Finland represented by students in the lab. It made my experience very diverse and interesting, because we all liked to discuss our cultural differences. The United States' leadership was often the punchline and many people asked me how life was from my perspective.

I primarily worked with a Swedish PhD, French post-doctoral student, and a Finnish master's student named Kaisa. Kaisa was pregnant, so I did all of the work involving harmful contaminants for her. She was very appreciative that I was there, her and I learned our way around the lab together since we both started working there the same week. She was much older and had lived in Nigeria for years volunteering there before moving back to Finland to continue her education and raise her family. She taught me that even though we are making a difference by doing such important research, being on the front-lines will have the biggest impact, and everyone should experience it so they can remember what they're working toward. Talking to people and working with those who are immediately affected by environmental disasters is where the biggest difference is to be made, even if it may just enrich your passion and remind you why you chose such a difficult and controversial field of study.

Personally, I think the hardest part about being there was seeing how far behind the United States and many other parts of the world is compared to places like Finland. It was shocking to see the technology, innovation, and even mindset that people in Europe have. At one point when I was working in the lab, I made a minor mistake and forgot to write down what was in the box that I had just put in the freezer. One of the other students said to me, "It's alright, it's not your fault you're American." Did I really come off as that ignorant? I went through a short phase where I was very homesick. I was tired of every conversation being centered around politics. People laughed at me when they found out I only spoke one language. There were times I felt like I didn't belong. I found it challenging to find reasons to be proud of my country at times. I wanted to be as proud of the United States as the Finns are of Finland.

I focused on the things I knew I was good at. I loved working in the lab and learning new things. I often worked longer hours than many of the other students. The lab technicians noticed this and said "You can tell you're American because you work so much. Go home! Get some rest!" The Swedish PhD student, Andreas, quickly became my mentor. I looked up to him because he knew so much about chemistry and microbiology. He designed the entire procedure to homogenize fish and quantify the exact volumes of PAHs used on the fish using High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC). He was always so humble about his work and

when I complimented him on the complexity of it all, he would just say, “Actually it’s very straightforward.” I learned so much from him and hope that I can be as good of a scientist as he is someday.

I can honestly say that my experience in Finland was life changing, in more ways than one. It helped me realize what I want to do in life and more importantly, what needs to be done. It’s been extremely difficult to have a positive mindset coming back, but I am pushing through, and fighting to make a change here in the U.S. I will forever be grateful for this opportunity and I hope to inspire more students to take advantage of such an amazing gift.

Molly McFadden—Kenya

Through the generosity of the Posey GLOBAL Foundation and Alma College, I was able to spend the month of June volunteering at an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Governor, Kenya through the Marafiki International Community. The persons living in the camp were displaced by the inter-tribe violence that occurred following the 2007 Kenyan presidential election. While at the camp, I spent most of my time volunteering at the primary school, Southern Cross Academy. Working at the camp was eye-opening in a number of ways, but there were three main takeaways for me from the experience.

The first was the long term effects displacement can have on individuals and the community. Peter, the leader of the volunteer program at the camp, was only a few years older than me, but could easily have been mistaken for middle-aged by his maturity. He was still in high school when his family had to flee for their safety in the middle of the night. Listening to Peter recount his experiences was heartbreaking, but what was even more heartbreaking was listening to him describe the things he still carried inside. He explained how loud noises still terrified him and a camping trip had left him unhinged as it drew up unpleasant memories of living in a tent for years. In the US Peter would undoubtedly be diagnosed with PTSD, but in the village he has no access to psychosocial care. The psychological effects of violence and displacement even impacted the students at the school, many of whom were born in the camps. The children were extremely rough with one another and playtime often looked more like a brawl. Faith, one of the school's teachers, explained that the children were often raised in rough environments and mimic behaviors and attitudes they saw at home. I was shocked to see how severe an impact displacement had had on the lives of those who were only born in time to see its aftermath.

I was also shocked by how little I truly understood of life as a refugee. I came into the experience with an extensive understanding of the laws and conventions that applied to refugees and displaced persons, but seeing the camp in person completely changed my perspective. We are so often exposed to the idea of a refugee as a person living in a tent, receiving aid from a UN worker. In reality the tents had been replaced with small, concrete structures organized into smaller camps, each of which had been built by a different NGO. There was no longer an NGO presence, despite the clear need for additional assistance and infrastructure.

The final takeaway was the role of the international community and its unintentional shortcomings when addressing displacement. Looking at the design of the camps as well as listening to Peter's recollections of the early days of the displacement, it became apparent that there was little cooperation, and certainly no cohesive approach formulated, between various international agencies. And while hundreds of people remained in the camp in substandard living conditions, as previously mentioned, the support from the international community had completely dried up. Peter spoke highly of Izzo, the owner of Marafiki, who took notice of the skills of the refugees and helped provide jobs within the company for many in the camp. These opportunities helped sustained many after support from international organizations ended. These issues have inspired me to pursue research on best practices for humanitarian aid in protracted refugee situations.

Brendan Murdie—India

Traveling to India through the Posey Global Program has been one of the best experiences of my life. It was my first time truly being out of the country and it could not have been better. I learned so much about a completely different place in the world that I had never really thought of traveling to before. During class, I taught my students about the UN and the international system, but they also taught a lot to me as well. They taught me about Indian culture, entertainment, and also some Hindi. They also helped me figure out what I want to do for a career. I'm still not entirely sure but education is definitely an option. Getting the chance to go to India at basically no cost was a wonderful experience and I'm so thankful for the Posey Global Program.

We arrived in India late at night and our driver as well as one of the program administrators, Ana, was there. We drove in the darkness of night and all I could do was look out the window. I wanted to see everything there was to see about India. And over the course of the next 7 weeks, I would see a good portion of it. That very next morning we were up bright and early so that we could make it to Shiv Nadar Schools Noida campus on time. This was the first time we would be able to meet both the students, teachers, and administrators of the school. That first day was the beginning of a wonderful experience that couldn't have gone much better. Over the course of our time in Noida, I learned how difficult it is to teach. Not that I ever thought it was easy, but it's hard to fully understand until you've tried it. What may make sense to one student can sound like gibberish to another. I often had to revise my prepared lesson plans during class because we would spend way longer on a subject I thought would be easy. The opposite was also true. Sometimes I thought the topic for the day would be very difficult, and we would finish it in 15 minutes. As our time there went on, I also learned how important it was to be willing to draw a line for how the students were behaving. Overall, the students were wonderful, but some days they were especially rowdy. On those days, it was important for me to find a way to be firm, but not just yell at the students. Much like everything, teaching is a balance, and it took me a while to find, but I think I got there eventually.

As I mentioned before, this is really the first time I've truly been out of the country. I've been to Mexico and some of the islands in the Caribbean before, but the places I went to were very westernized because they catered to tourists. I would say this was the first time I had been completely out of my normal environment. For some people, that may be a bad thing, but for me, it was amazing to see how different peoples' lives are in different parts of the world. In Noida, single homes and neighborhoods were basically nonexistent. Everything was basically a high-rise apartment building. There were people living on the streets, and there were actually makeshift houses right outside of the walls of the school. I got to see firsthand the many religions that are present in India. We also ate lots of wonderful Indian food that I would never think to try had I not gone to India. This trip to India has done wonderful things for me. It opened my eyes to many more international problems that we were able to teach our students about. I'm hopeful that I made an impact on my students and perhaps started their path to make the world a better place. The summer before my first year as a college student, I never thought that in a year's time I would be teaching classes by myself at a school in Noida. And yet that was made possible through the Posey Global Program. And for that, I will be forever grateful.

Sam Nelson—El Paso, Texas

One of the critical pieces of a liberal arts education is humility; that when you try to leave an impact, you realize what it means to stand on the shoulders of giants. Like many others facing the wonderful opportunities at Alma College, I got filled with dreams of changing the world for the better. Rigorous courses and a summer focused on teaching about climate change left me with quite the opposite feeling; that the problems faced around the world are insurmountable, beyond any reasonable effort.

I had never heard of Annunciation House before last winter. In fact, my first encounter wasn't all that favorable; I had a healthy degree of hesitation looking at their aging website. Nonetheless, the mission of hospitality to migrants at the southern border stuck with me. I sought out insight from professors who had sponsored students' travel there before, and decided to give it a go.

As I worked on the application, it seemed that the news became more focused on the border too. By the time that I had arrived to El Paso, Texas, seemingly endless coverage had documented the plight of asylum seekers. Nothing could have prepared me for my first night at Casa del Refugiado, the Annunciation House site I had been assigned. A longer term volunteer picked me up from the airport, and showed me around the shelter. The shelter was not a conventional setting; it was a converted warehouse on the east side of El Paso. The 125,000 square foot facility had been transformed from a processing center for electrical equipment into a temporary home for up to 500 asylum seekers at a time with murals on the wall, cots and blankets for the guests, and several facilities like a clothing bank and hygiene room.

My first shift providing hospitality was also unpredictable. After some training and orientation with the nearly 20 other students from around the country for a few days, I shadowed a site coordinator to get the first hand lessons on how to help run the shelter. My first act of hospitality? Handing out hot dogs. Nothing grand, nothing tender, just a whole lot of hot dogs to recently detained asylum seekers. It is worth noting I also lived at this shelter. The mission of Annunciation House is not just hospitality; it is solidarity. Though we had separate volunteer quarters, I ate the same Salvation Army provided meals with our guests, and I used the same porta-potties (the shelter did not have indoor plumbing).

My specific role as a shift coordinator was a "full circle" experience. In charge of the operations at Casa del Refugiado for 8 hours a day, several days a week, I felt like the rubber meeting the road. I was not going to change the conditions in Central America that prompted our guests to leave their homes. I was not going to end the excessive cruelty of the militarized border. The world was not mine for the changing. All I could do was provide dignity. I made sure every guest who arrived on my watch made sure to receive their orientation for the shelter, knew we were not immigration officials, and could connect to the sponsors who were buying their tickets to every corner of the country. I did not do this alone; no one could. It was by working with at least a dozen other people, all with a diverse set of skills, that we could provide a safe and clean environment for some of the world's most vulnerable people. I knew I could never single handedly change the world, but if I find the right people to support, I had a chance to find a spot somewhere in history.

Some have compared El Paso to a contemporary Ellis Island; I believe that to be true deep in my heart. There was a reason we constantly had to entertain national figures from media to members of congress (and presidential candidates). We are all becoming more acutely aware of the dynamic that citizens have with the undocumented, and the challenges of those hoping to

reside in the United States. There is action to be taken in connecting with local immigration advocacy organizations, and all the more reason to send more students to the border. At the time of writing, there are plans for Alma College students to return over the next two breaks from school, and next summer.