



Contributed photo

Julie Coyne, who turns 30 this year, hugs three Guatemalan youngsters on a recent trip to that country.

# Learning to receive

## Norwalk woman returns to Guatemala to help those in need

By NICOLE RIVARD  
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The corn was starting to grow when Julie Coyne left Guatemala. Before she left, she said to her *hermanitos*, or little brothers, "When the corn is ready to be harvested, I'll be back."

Coyne's little brothers are the children she works with as a volunteer in Guatemala. After a summer at home in Norwalk, Coyne is leaving Friday to return to Guatemala for her third year.

Back in Guatemala, her little brothers call her *Tia* for aunt, and they are eagerly awaiting her arrival. This summer, Coyne received a letter from Tico, a 15-year-old boy who grew up in an orphanage because of his parents' separation. He told Coyne that she had given him a sense of family that he had never felt he had.

Coyne said the last time she came home she did not realize so many people had noticed her absence.

"When I went back everyone in the neighborhood asked where I had been. One of my neighbors shouted "Oh my angel" when she saw me. There are times when I think I'll stay in Guatemala forever because the people become part of your family."

Coyne said that many people ask her, "Why

Guatemala, why not a soup kitchen in Norwalk?"

Coyne replies, "The need is so intense there that it is emotionally exhausting. Kids don't have shoes or blankets. Not everyone has those things here, but their access through a larger amount of programs is exponentially greater."

"Being in the Guatemalan environment makes you feel how big the world is, and how insulated it is here in Fairfield County. We don't easily see our connections to everything else."

But Coyne is making those connections through her volunteer work as Norwalkers help fund her efforts.

"St. Jerome's parish has been so helpful. I'm amazed when people who give me donations thank me for letting them become involved. I've learned a lesson about receiving donations, that I don't have to think about it as being dependent but as a way to allow people to have a part in my work."



Hour photo/Steve Zavalski  
Julie Coyne

Coyne became involved with her work when she decided she wanted to learn Spanish. She found out about Centro de Estudios de Espanol Pop Wuj, a school that uses tuition for community service projects. As a student, Coyne took part in projects like building latrines and stoves. She became so immersed in Guatemalan life that she continued to stay after completing her studies. Her sisters, Maggie and Kate, will attend the school in October.

As much as she gives Coyne receives.

"Living so closely with the families, they teach me

about life, family, simple important things. It's okay to want more sometimes, but we have what we really need. Consumerism creates imaginary needs, but we have to realize they aren't necessities."